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THE NI

NEW INTERNAT

Special report by JOHN PILGER

BURMA
a cry for freedom

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COMING NEXT MONTH

Class

Does it exist? Does it matter? Can we do without it? Next month the **NI** digs a little deeper into the gulf between rich and poor. We unearth some familiar fossils and discover how things like ownership, power, privilege and exploitation still fit together. The world has changed beyond recognition, yet remains much the same.

IAN BERRY / MAGNUM

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- **Starvelings of the market –** whatever became of the working class?
- **Know your place –** how are *you* coping with the class struggle? – a questionnaire
- **Gold coast –** why there's no dancing in the corridors of power in Ghana
- **The classless society –** questions and answers on Utopia
- **Traitor! –** when *ambience* gets in the wrong place
- **The female face of the proletariat** – where the workers are now and how to help
- **The ancient mariner –** interview with Studs Terkel
- **Who will change the world? –** gender, caste or class, in India

Class

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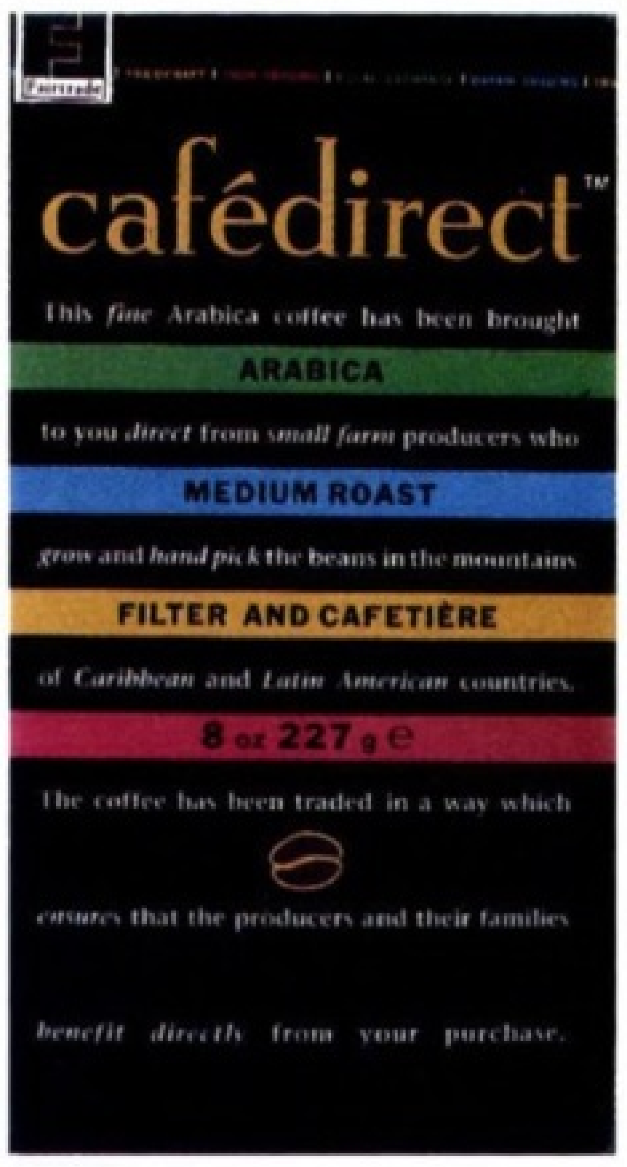
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THE COVER PHOTOGRAPH SHOWS A PROTESTER ON THE STREETS OF RANGOON DURING THE PRO-DEMOCRACY DEMONSTRATIONS OF SUMMER 1988. THE MILITARY BRUTALLY CRUSHED THE PROTESTS, KILLING THOUSANDS.
PHOTOGRAPH BY **STEVE LEHMAN** OF **SABA**
MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY **ANDREW KOKOTKA**

THIS MONTH'S **THEME**

Burma

FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITOR**

I am delighted to have edited, with Vanessa Baird, this special issue of **NI** on **Burma**. Since the uprising against the military dictatorship I have wanted to reclaim on film a sense of the epic events of 1988 which, unlike their equivalent in Eastern Europe the following year, have been largely overlooked. My film-making partner David Munro and I (that's us, below, in Burma), began planning the assignment more than a year ago. The problem of how to get into Burma, to film widely and get the film out, seemed insurmountable. Then the Rangoon generals declared 1996 'Visit Myanmar Year' and we knew we had been handed an unmissable opportunity.

When David and I filmed secretly in East Timor in 1993 we transformed ourselves into 'travel consultants' working for a London firm, 'Adventure Tours'. Our documents, in several languages, were designed to reassure our hosts should they suspect us of being, heaven forbid, journalists. We were described as 'specialists in exotic travel' who, if allowed to pursue our professional activities, would dispatch in our wake plane-loads of tourists laden with foreign exchange: just the sort of folk to be warmly welcomed by dictators craving dollars and the dubious respectability that goes with mass tourism and foreign investment.

As this subterfuge allowed us to talk our way out of trouble at least once in East Timor, we decided it was appropriate for Burma, where the generals are banking on tourism to assist in covering their crimes (as it has done in Indonesia: tourists in Bali are unaware that the carparks in their hostels cover mass graves) and in making their regime acceptable to the World Bank, the IMF, ASEAN and all the other pillars of the 'global economy'. I trust that this special issue, together with our ITV film for Carlton, *Inside Burma: Land of Fear,* offer serious impediment to these endeavours.

David's skill with the camera under pressure deserves special recognition. Many people helped us. There are a number of remarkable Westerners who live in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, who care deeply about the Burmese and their right to freedom, and I am grateful to them, especially Faith Doherty and Shona Kirkwood for their superb ground work. My appreciation also goes to David Boardman, Nicholas Greenwood and Zunetta Liddell. Bertil Lintner's *Outrage*, a brilliant journalistic record of the uprising, was an early inspiration, and I am sorry I never met the author.

Above all, I pay tribute to those Burmese who willingly gave me their testimony, however painfully. They are as far afield as Oslo, where the Democratic Voice of Burma transmits hope to its many listeners in Burma; and Thailand, where the heroes of 1988 have to battle the local authorities as well as the trauma of their dispossession; and the Karen-held liberated areas; and, of course, in Burma itself. After all these years I suppose I am a 'specialist' in exotic travel and I can say unreservedly that I have seldom been as moved as I was by the courage and grace of the Burmese I met, from Aung San Suu Kyi to those ordinary people who understood exactly what we were doing yet insisted on looking after us, regardless of the risk. They deserve more than tourists and profiteers. This issue is dedicated to them.

John Pilger

John Pilger
for the ***New Internationalist*** *Co-operative*

Letters

The New Internationalist welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address and e-mail are inside the front cover.

Alternatives

It was particularly good to find new reasons for hope and practical suggestions for ways out of the mess in your issue on ***Green Economics*** (**NI 278**).

I'm ordering five extra copies to send to the leaders of our political parties who *might* be looking for alternatives to IMF/World Bank dependency.

THE NI NEW INTERNATIONALIST
Seeds of change
How to build a green economy

Stewart Lane
Limbe, Malawi

Christian antidote

José Lutzenberger tells us (***Green Economics*** **NI 278**) that 'Modern industrial society is based on an absurd worldview, a worldview that we have inherited from our Judaeo-Christian past.' While I would agree that many Christians have misinterpreted texts in the Bible's creation accounts to justify environmentally destructive behaviour, the book of Genesis depicts an initially harmonious relationship between humankind, God and creation, and in numerous passages the Bible points to nature as a symbol of God's creativity. Moreover, Christianity should act as an effective antidote to mindless consumerism in that it firmly places our ultimate satisfaction outside the purely material realm.

Michael Mackenzie
Wokingham, England

Welfare benefits

A footnote to your article on the withdrawal of welfare benefits from asylum seekers in the United Kingdom (*Update* **NI 278**). The British Government has stopped short of forcing the children of asylum-seekers to live on the streets, but it is requiring local government to pay the cost of providing for such children and their carers.

Fine so far, but this is likely to mean greatly increased expenditure by the local councils at a time when all are facing cutbacks due to central government pressure on budgets. In addition, such provision is of no comfort to adult asylum seekers without children.

David Burnell
Northwood, England

Forgotten groups

Your 'Facts' map in the issue on nation-states (***Bullets and Borders*** **NI 277**) marks only the Chechens and the Inuit as groups in Russia which have problems with their hosts. There are also over 30 indigenous peoples, of which almost every one struggles for their rights. There are over two million Finno-Ugrig peoples, of which Mordvins and Maris are the biggest groups, Khanties and Mansies the most threatened. In addition there are Yakuts, Evenks, Nenets and several others. Most of them have severe problems with oil-drilling and logging businesses. Unfortunately the indigenous peoples of Russia are all too frequently forgotten in Western publications.

Hannu Virtanen
Turku, Finland

Local fruits

I was moved by Alison Napier's 'The Angry Scot' (**NI 277**) and understand perfectly well her sense and awareness of place.

I feel the same when I see my local authority invest huge sums of taxpayers' money on projects covertly developed to attract tourists, not overtly aimed at the needs of the people who live and work here. Something similar happened in the Algarve in the 1970s, when local and national politicians favoured foreigners – and foreign investors – and they were treated better than locals. Ironically, now the politicians complain about their cement ghost towns – the fruit of the once-acclaimed anarchic tourist boom.

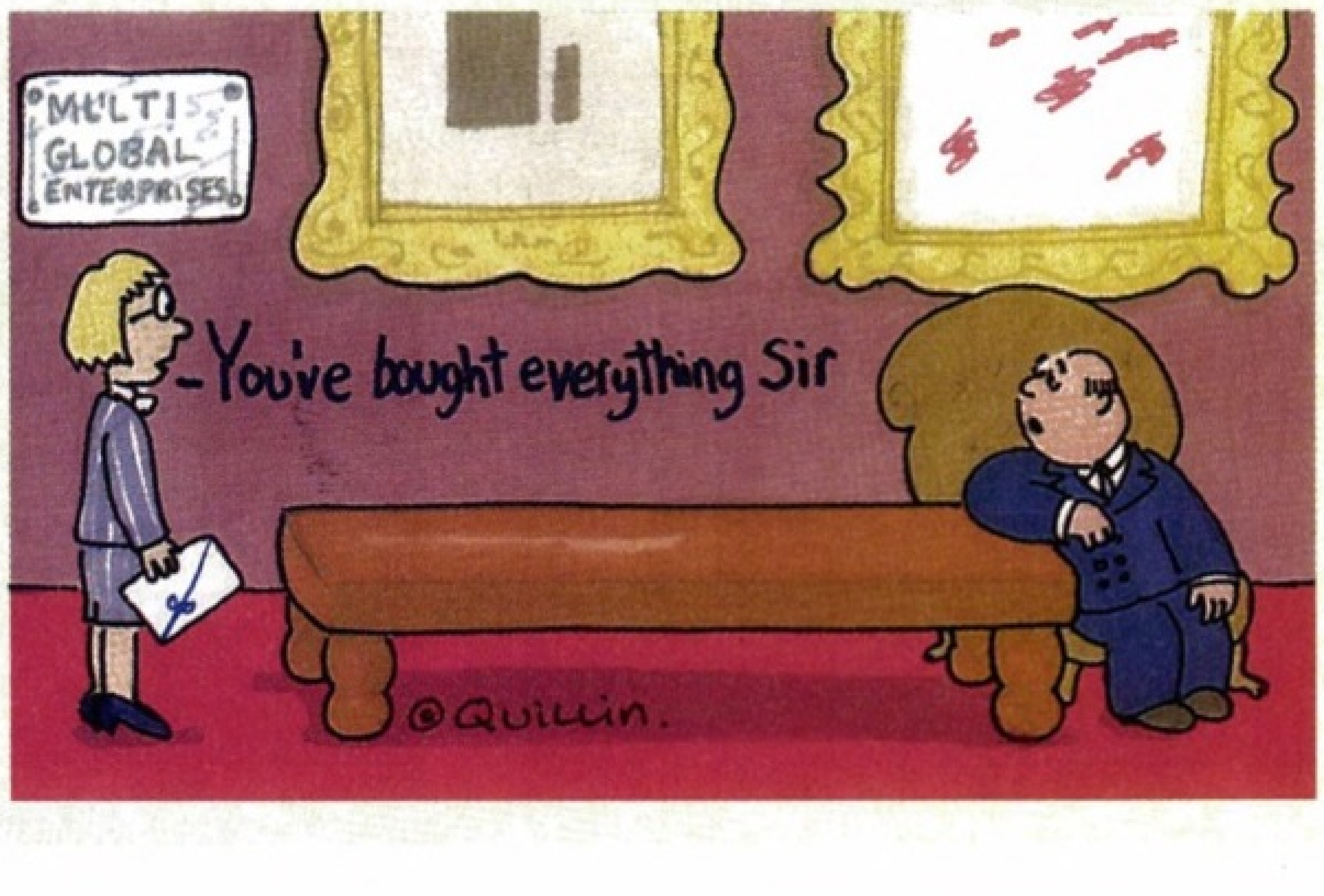
Octávio Lima
Espinho, Portugal

Genuinely green

Your issue on ***Green Economics*** (**NI 278**) is one of the best I've read. The implications of a genuinely green ecological global system would be unacceptable to most people in today's 'profits before people' economic creed.

Ironically, the alleged lifeblood of the system – competition – is being constantly diminished or destroyed by take-overs and mergers on an ever-increasing global scale. Democracy is rapidly becoming meaningless but how the trend is to be halted is a very complex question and, as far as I can see, the answer will only become apparent when the basic resources we are squandering seriously affect us directly.

F A Beal
Cardiff, Wales



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National liberation

In your issue on the nation-state (**NI 277**), you failed to notice the importance of the national liberation struggle in combating imperialism – that is, monopoly capitalism.

You do not discriminate between the positive role of nationalists during the struggles for independence and the cynical manipulation of national sentiment to justify oppression of national minorities and other ethnic groups. Cuban 'nationalism' has been a positive force in history for the past several decades and the 'nationalist' struggle of the Zapatistas of Chiapas helped weaken the corrupt regime in Mexico.

What oppressed groups and nations want is the right to self-determination, and to deny that right is to support oppression.

S Sivasegaram
London, England

Hoary myths

Correspondent SJ Indran in a letter to the **NI** (***Tibet*** **NI 274**) repeats the hoary myths of Tibet as a feudal hell, from which China kindly liberated it. These fantasies of Tibetan barbarism originate in the accounts of 19th-century European travellers, whose imperialist eyes construed the natives as lazy and treacherous, and the indigenous leaders, including the lamas, as corrupt and cruel. This was standard imperialist discourse, be it Tibet, Africa or the Balkans which was the object of Western 'otherizing'. Tibet is a major civilization, a major contributor to the global and cultural heritage which is ruthlessly repressed by a China convinced of its superiority, in ways remarkably reminiscent of high Victorian England. SJ Indran may think of himself as a champion of the poor, yet clings to stale categories of thought which suggest very little contact with Tibetans as real people struggling to be heard in the real world.

Gabriel Lafitte
Australia Tibet Council, Melbourne, Australia

Generosity

I would like to take up one point in Rosalind Riley's letter (*Letters* **NI 277**). She suggests that randomly giving up material things is not going to help a tortured prisoner. That may be true, but every time a person gives things up so that they can instead donate money to help others, then someone somewhere will certainly be helped, often greatly.

I do not think rich people should believe that generosity is futile. If human beings can learn to be generous and to forego their materialistic aspirations, then there is hope for the future. After all, it is these greedy aspirations which continue to dictate the harmful policies of many Western nations.

Robert Nicholls
Manchester, England

“?”

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The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the New Internationalist.

LETTER FROM **RUSSIA**

Reaching for the stars

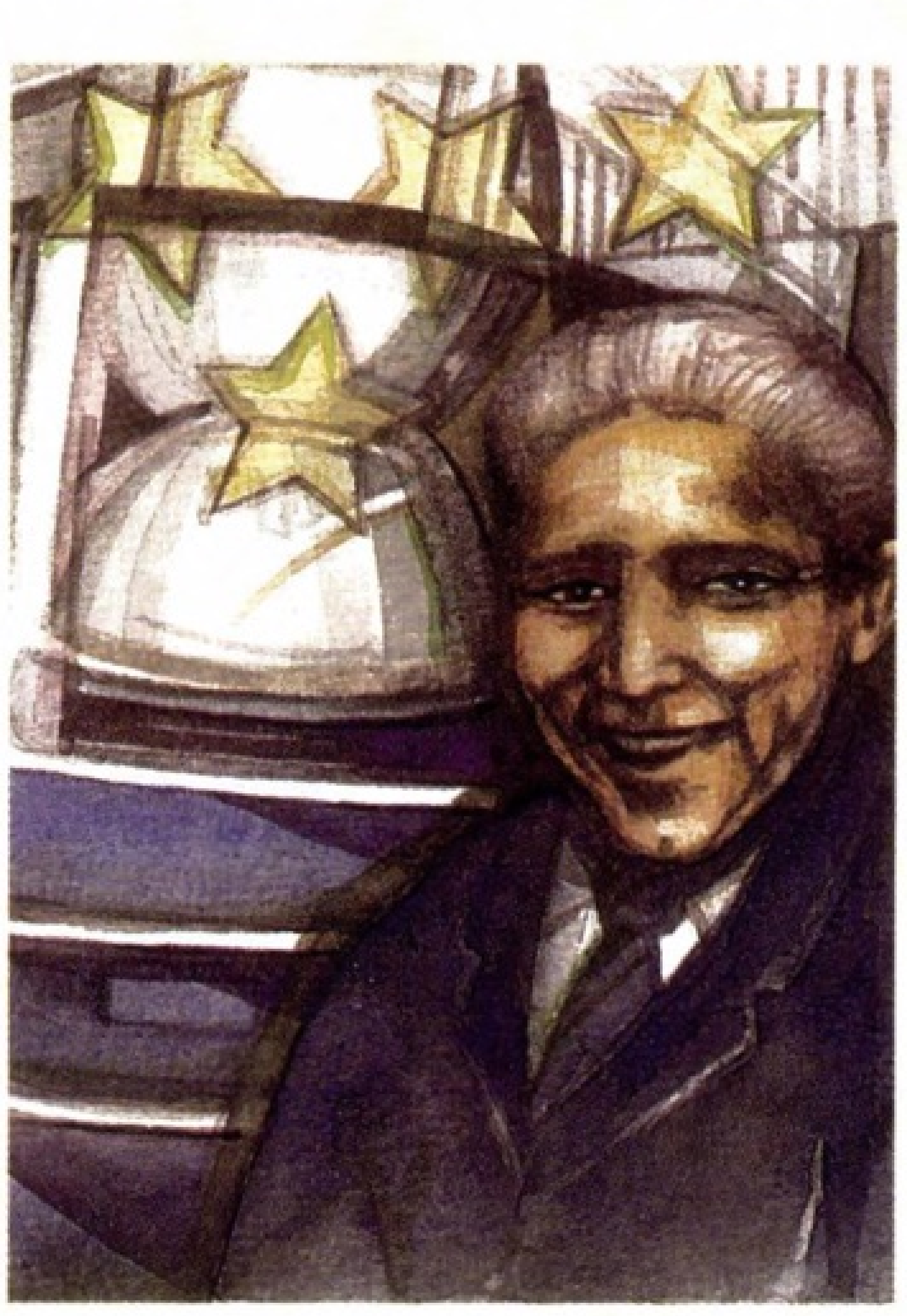
Olivia Ward meets a cosmonaut in Star City.

THE rundown building says: 'Cosmonauts Post Office'. But there are no visible signs of mail delivery. Nowadays it is used for earthlier pursuits – meetings, interviews, business deals. These are the basic necessities of the threadbare Russian space program and its cosmonaut training headquarters, named, in English, 'Star City'.

I ignore my slightly shabby surroundings because the man sitting in front of me is a dazzling piece of living history. Boris Volinov, a silver-haired man with a grip of steel, is telling me with dry humour of his near-death experiences in space, as though he were a schoolteacher reviewing a particularly trying trek.

'Both trips had problems,' he says with magnificent understatement. 'But of course nobody talked about them at the time.'

Volinov, a contemporary of space pioneer Yuri Gagarin, flew his first mission in 1989. At re-entry time, a set of massive solar batteries failed to separate from his landing craft, dragging him upside-down and unprotected into the earth's scorching atmosphere. Only a freak explosion saved his life by blowing away the batteries and bringing him back to earth with a tooth-cracking jolt.



MIRIAM McCURDY

I listen like a child hearing a thrilling bedtime story for the first time, unable to imagine the terror, dedication and euphoria of those moments. As I lean forward so as not to miss a word, he launches into a second hair-raising tale.

Seven years after his first trip, Volinov and his flight engineer experienced the cosmonaut's ultimate nightmare – power blackout in space. In a devastating silence they waited for the oxygen to run out and the spacecraft to become another inert object, whirling into the giant charnel-house of infinity.

By groping his way around the cabin, Volinov managed to restart the system and wrestle the ship back on course. His cabin-mate, in deep shock, was at the point of breakdown and the mission was cut short to 49 days. Even on the ground the near-tragedy of errors continued. Touching down hundreds of kilometres from their target area in Kazakhstan, the two cosmonauts were temporarily lost on the barren steppes.

These terrible and heroic stories are even more impressive within the peeling walls of Star City. In a nearby building the training centre's cramped and tinny simulated spacecraft, like the ones from which Volinov barely returned alive, speak of a shoestring budget, but also of unconcern for the individuals inside them.

At the height of the space program's fame, after Gagarin's historic 1961 orbit of the earth, the same ethic prevailed. While Americans treated the fledgling astronauts with awe, the Soviets used them as instruments. Some even resented Gagarin's fame, and tightened the net of secrecy to prevent others following him into the limelight.

As my thoughts wander, my guide Sergei is staring at his watch. Volinov apologizes with a smile, and prepares to depart. The $500 fee I've paid to rent a day of the training centre's time is stretched to the limit.

Sergei is also apologetic, slightly shamefaced. He is a former space official who cannot retire because his pension is too small. Like Volinov, he lives in the heavily guarded enclave that is still a closed city, secure only in his hard-won apartment.

Now this very secrecy has become a commodity that can be sold to scientists, reporters or curiosity-seekers for an admission fee. Those who pay more than $3,000 can indulge in a Disney-style program that imitates an instant cosmonaut training program complete with a 'weightless flight'. And real training for foreign cosmonauts costs more than a million dollars.

'You see, we have to live,' Sergei shrugs wryly. 'We must invent new ways to survive all the time. That is what we have come to.'

My Western mind is balking at all this. At a man who has reached out to the stars and found only small change in his hands. At an official who once directed outer space missions and now acts as a tour guide to meet his inner needs. And at a system that created and abandoned them both without apology.

As though reading my mind, Volinov clasps my hand in his crushing grip. 'We did all this, you know, for one reason,' he says. 'We were star-struck.'

He smiles broadly. 'We still are. Whatever happens on earth, we are looking up at the cosmos.'

Then he is gone, only his footsteps remaining in the melting spring snow. ■

Olivia Ward is bureau chief for the *Toronto Star* in Moscow.

Update

RIVERS

Ganges unbound

Campaigners make headway in Bihar

THE PEOPLE of Kagzi Tola, a settlement exclusively of fisherfolk in Bhagalpur district, Bihar, India, have just concluded their yearly *utsav*. The festival celebrates the beginning of the Ganga Mukti Andolan (GMA – 'Free Ganga Campaign'), a movement which sprang up on these banks 14 years ago. There were boat races, exhibitions, street plays and *deep daan* – the floating of lights down the Ganges.

Freeing a river from bondage might seem preposterous, but this is exactly what the Andolan set out to do in 1982, mobilizing fisherfolk, peasants and boatpeople against the *panidari* system, which gave landlords exclusive rights to fish and run boats over an 80-kilometre stretch of the Ganges, from Sultanganj to Pirpainti. Soon their slogan *Jaal baans auzar humara, ganga par adhikar humara* ('Nets and bamboo are our tools, we have a right over Ganga') became the rallying cry all over Bihar.

During its long years of struggle the campaign organized marches, *dharnas* (vigils) and meetings and attained a major victory in 1991, when the Bihar Government was forced to abolish the deeply entrenched *panidari* system.

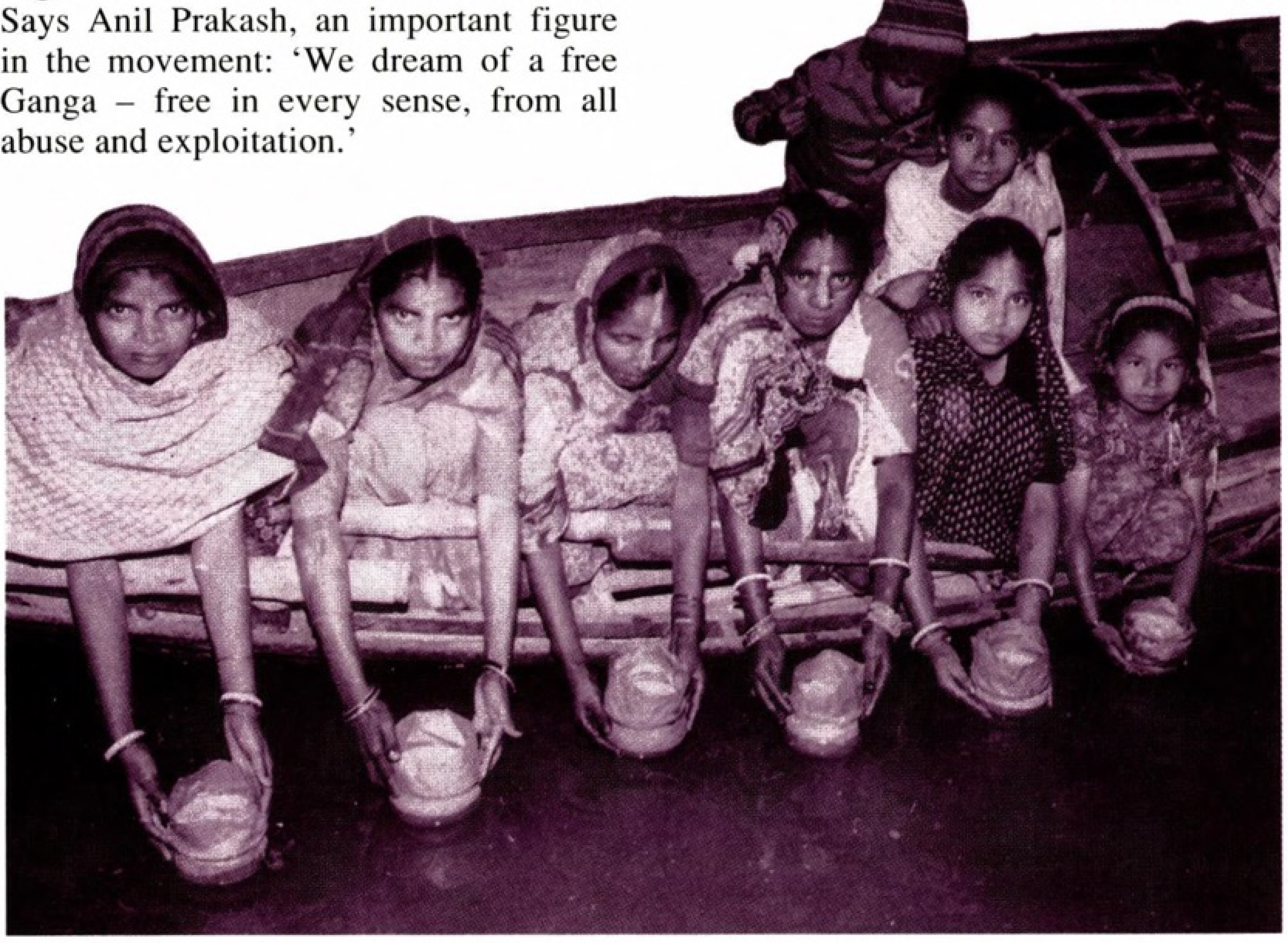
Since that turning point the movement has faced up to other complexities, fighting against the growing ecological degradation of the river and its banks. Says Anil Prakash, an important figure in the movement: 'We dream of a free Ganga – free in every sense, from all abuse and exploitation.'

A major problem is the sharp decline in fish stocks, with some locals estimating numbers to be down by as much as 75 per cent. This decline is a direct result of siltation and the destruction of the river's micro-ecosystem. Parvati Devi, a GMA activist, states: 'Our bellies are still empty. We have to fight against the pollution of Ganga. Otherwise our victory will remain hollow and Kagzi Tola will disappear from the pages of history.' Now the campaign is trying to get the message across through songs, street plays, large demonstrations and exhibitions.

Assessing the campaign, Professor Bilgrami, head of Bhagalpur University's botany department, who has done pioneering work on the Ganges says: 'GMA is no less significant than Chipko [the indigenous tree-conservation movement]. The honesty of its workers and its rapport with fisherfolk is excellent. It has no big leader or spokesperson. Ordinary, common people lead it. However, it has to learn to behave less like trade unionists and more like ecologists.'

This year's festival caught the people of GMA in a reflective mood. As a fisherwoman eloquently said: 'A decade ago, the Ganga used to make a lot of noise. Now it has become absolutely quiet. We have to make it noisy again if we want to survive.' ■

Charu Gupta



AJIT KUMAR JHA

Floating lights down the Ganges: *deep daan* makes this river 'noisy' again.

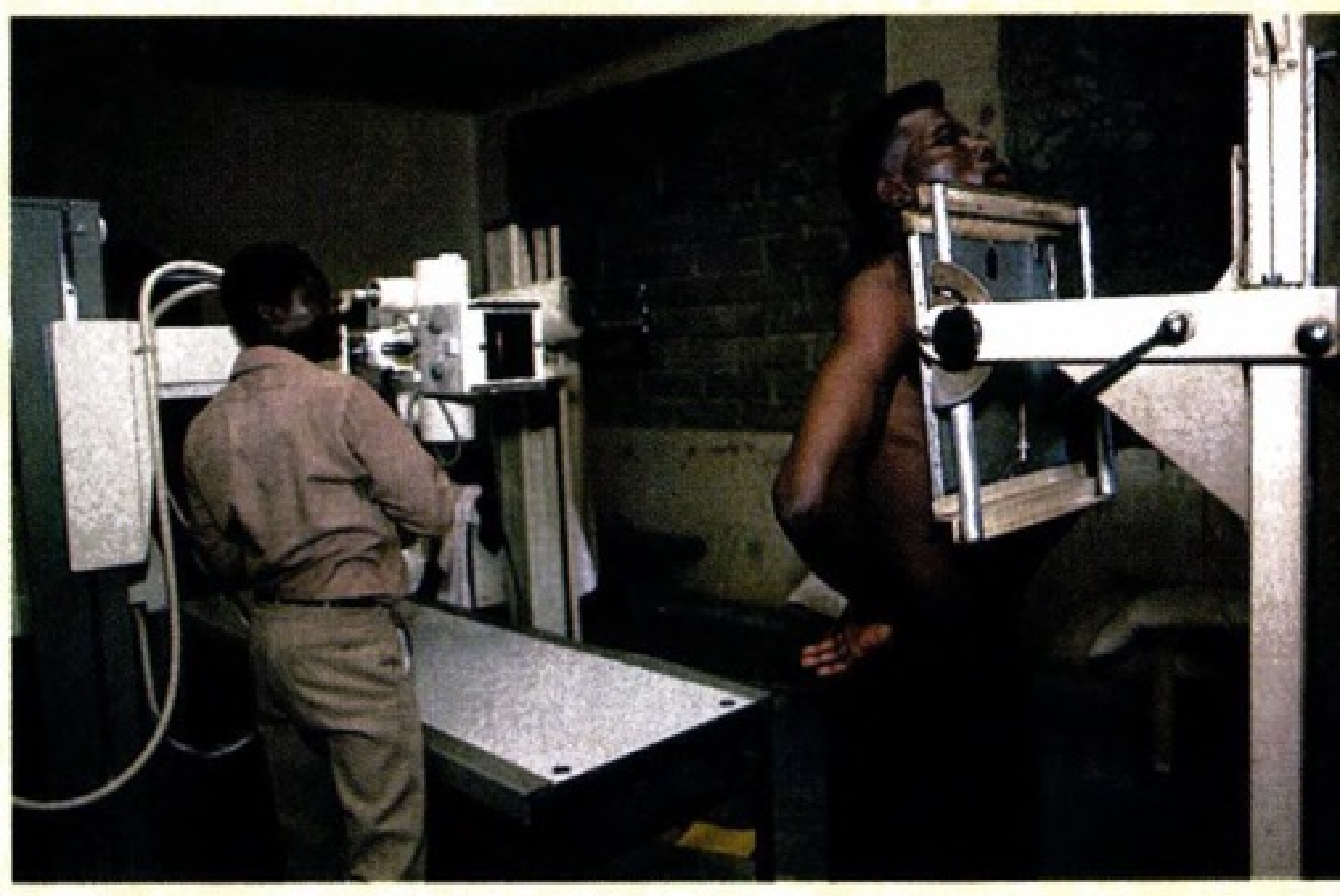
P GOSTELOW / CAMERA PRESS

Wide open spaces closed down in Mongolia.

Fenced in

Customary land-use by animal herders in Mongolia could change with a new Land Law which grants access to pasture only through formal land leases. The legislation will affect many of the 600,000 nomadic pastoralists on the grasslands which account for 79 per cent of Mongolia's vast land area, and resistance is certain. The Government argues that livestock numbers have increased in past years, as have the number of people on the pastures. The harsh climate makes it difficult to restore land damaged by overgrazing. But the herders have other fears – being locked into leases will limit their movement and oblige them to use land they might not otherwise have chosen.

Ann C Hudock, *Gemini News Service*



MARC FRENCH / PANOS PICTURES

Comeback for the killer: lack of international action blamed.

TB spreads

Tuberculosis is killing more people than at any time in history, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The position has deteriorated over the past three years, despite the WHO declaring TB a global emergency in 1993 – the first time it has ever singled out a disease in this way. A third of the world's population is now infected, with on average a new infection every second. Governmental complacency in many countries, and lack of international action, mean that TB could kill over a 100 million people during the next 50 years.

WHO Press Release

Putting his foot in it...

...was Belorussian President Aleksandr Lukashenko when he declared: 'Not everything in Germany connected to Adolf Hitler was bad. ...German order... reached its highest point under Hitler.' Not the most sensitive thing to say in a country where every fourth inhabitant died during Nazi occupation in World War Two.

World Press Review, Vol 43 No 2

On votre bike, mate

Finally the 140,000 Parisian bicycle owners who say they never dare to cycle on the streets may be persuaded to join the 100,000 who do. The new mayor of Paris, Jean Tiberi, has decided to open 56 kilometres of cycle tracks in the city. About $6 million will be spent and a thousand car-parking spaces will have to go.

The Guardian, 23 March 1996

Double dealing

Russian and US environmentalists are protesting at plans to fell trees in Siberia, which contains a fifth of the world's forests, to procure lumber to run idle sawmills in Oregon and Washington. On the one hand, the US Forest Service wants to protect the habitat of the Siberian tiger; on the other the US Department of Commerce is paying subsidies to the domestic wood industry to fell trees in the Siberian Khabarovsk region.

Down to Earth, Vol 4 No 20

Patently good

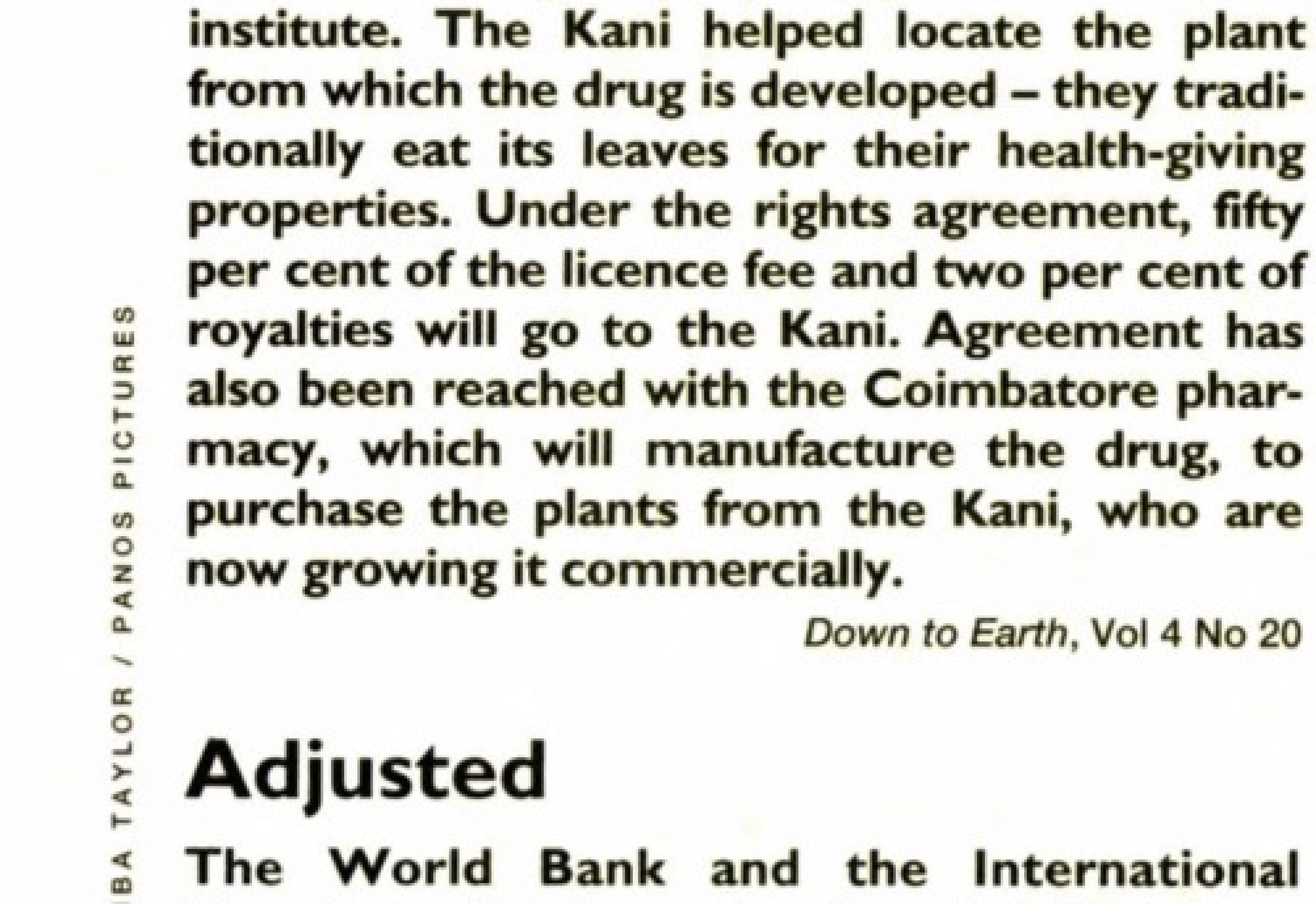
In the first deal of its kind, the Kani people of southern Kerala in India will get rights over an anti-stress drug developed by a local research institute. The Kani helped locate the plant from which the drug is developed – they traditionally eat its leaves for their health-giving properties. Under the rights agreement, fifty per cent of the licence fee and two per cent of royalties will go to the Kani. Agreement has also been reached with the Coimbatore pharmacy, which will manufacture the drug, to purchase the plants from the Kani, who are now growing it commercially.

Down to Earth, Vol 4 No 20

Adjusted

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are leading Bosnia into a structural-adjustment programme that will restrict public services urgently needed to restore peace to the country. The Bank agrees that a 'safety net' is necessary for people who will lose out from its free-market policies, but adds that 'inappropriate targeting and excessive amounts of social assistance would discourage work and enterprise'. The 'reconstruction package' is centred on rapid privatization and reforms designed to attract foreign investment.

Bankcheck Quarterly, No 13



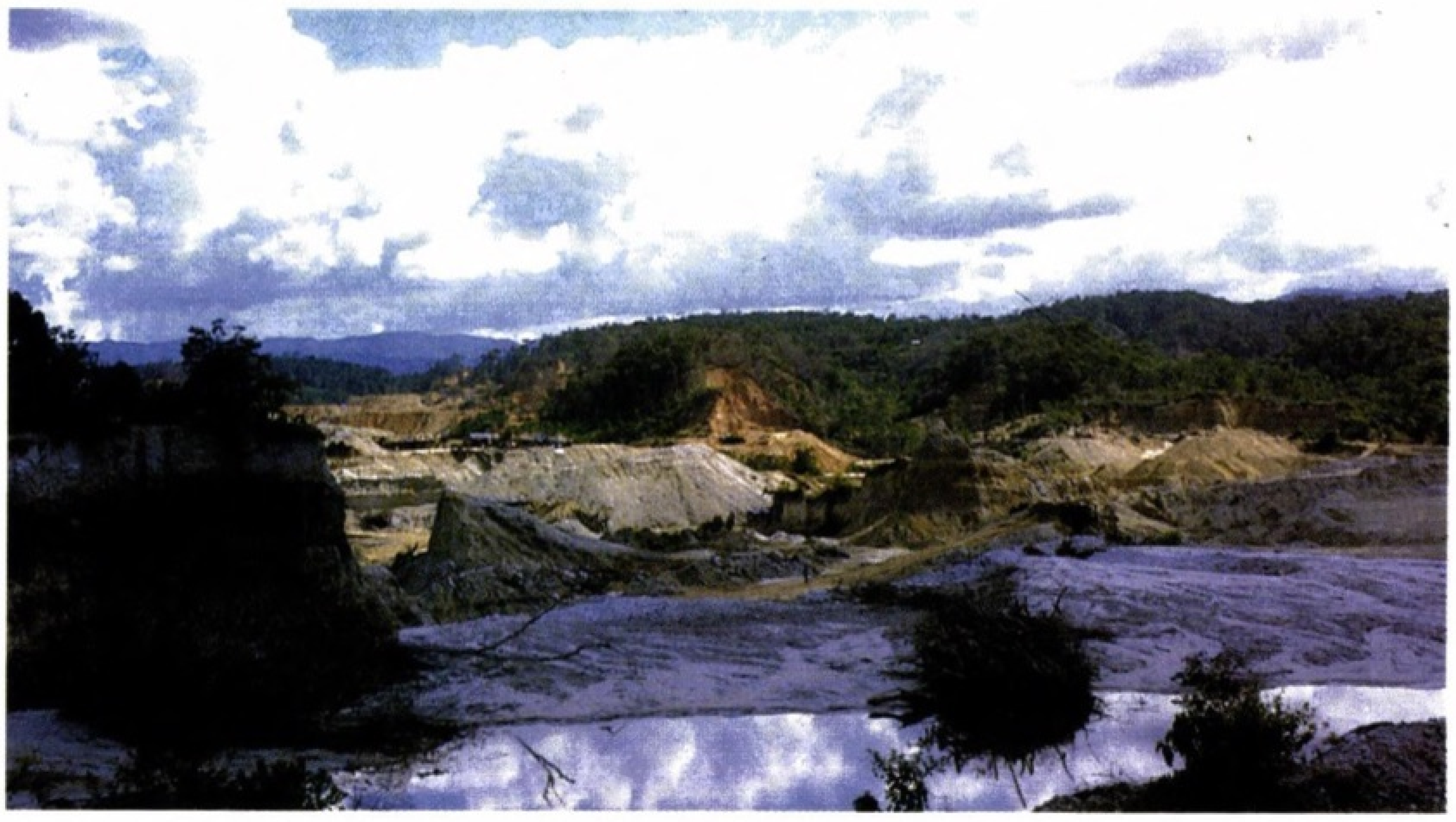
LIBA TAYLOR / PANOS PICTURES

Structural adjustment in Bosnia.

ENVIRONMENT

The rape of gold

Mining devastation in Peruvian Amazon



DILWYN JENKINS

A huge, muddy scar grows in the rainforest as monster machines move in.

SHEETS OF GOLD covered the walls of the Inca Sun Temple, Koricancha, 10,000 feet up in the Peruvian Andes at the navel of the world. This sacred metal came to the Incas from Madre de Dios, a remote, mostly uninhabited, unique cloud-forest region on the western rim of the Amazon basin.

Today a constant stream of trucks ploughs through the Madre de Dios, following the mud track kept open by bulldozers through the rains and the landslides to the small boom town of Huaypetue. The passengers are young men bound for a few months' work in the open gold mines around Huaypetue. Up to three years ago the mining involved large numbers of child slaves, but now child labour has been replaced by monster-sized earth-moving machinery which is turning one of the Amazon's most biodiverse regions into a huge, muddy scar.

The area around Huaypetue is now a desert. Scattered here and there are small miners' camps constructed from vivid, blue-plastic sheeting, sometimes with a satellite dish sticking out. Around the camps are generators, pumps, earth movers and continual gold-washing activity. All plant and animal life has been chewed up and spat out as gravel, all for a few ounces of gold a day. The giant trees are gone and the earth scooped up to a depth of 30 metres. All this earth is moved to a washing rack where high-powered hoses separate the silt and gold from the mud and gravel.

The mines are totally unregulated, with only 13 police officers for around 15,000 miners in the region. The indigenous inhabitants, mainly Amarakeire Indians, are in fear of losing control of their lands to an ever-increasing stream of miners and settlers coming down from the high Andes. And their rivers are dying because of pollution from the mines up-stream. The forest is disappearing under a 24-hour attack by huge front-loading machines whose owners usually have only 18 months to pay back the $180,000 they borrowed to pay for them.

Now the miners are moving down the Pukiri river and towards the Tambopata protected area. At the Amarakeire village of Barranco Chico, on the banks of the Pukiri, one can see how much the Indians have to lose. They have been panning the river for gold for the past 20 years, but there is no sign of environmental damage. Now the mud soup is coming downstream from Huaypetue, killing all fish. Along the Colorado river members of the native community at San José report beatings and death threats from the miners and police. One man said: 'We hope it will come to world attention that we natives are being threatened with death by the invaders... We'll kill them if they kill us, but that is the situation... It is that bad!'

With Mobil Oil having signed a contract with PetroPeru for the rights to engage in seismic exploration for oil and gas in the Madre de Dios, the world can no longer ignore the needs of the area's indigenous people and its natural resources. Provision has to be made for the settlers and gold miners, but they need to be moved from indigenous land – and regulated. ■

Dilwyn Jenkins / Work Kraft

Update

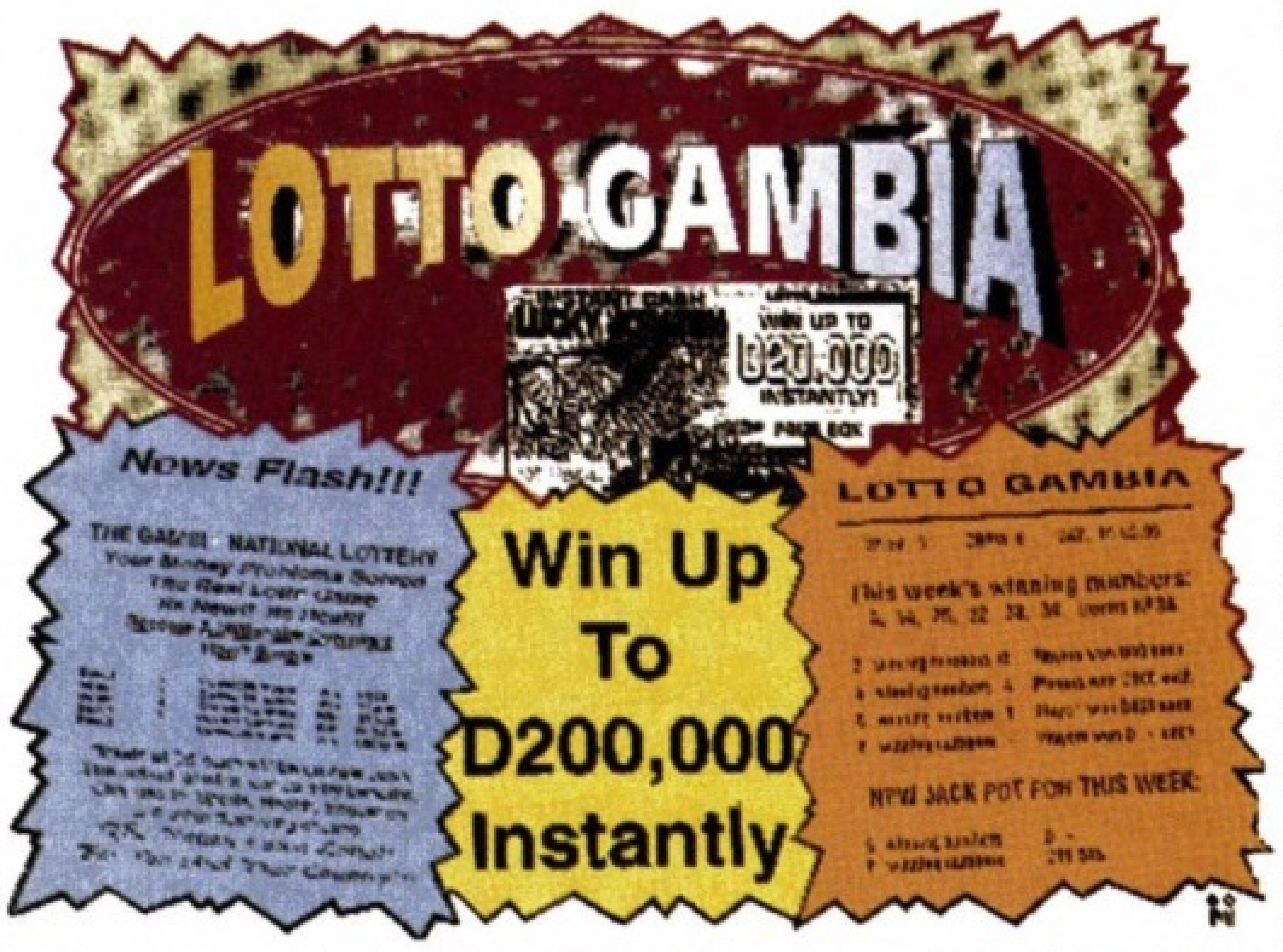
THE GAMBIA

Devil's dilemma

Backdoor gambling by Muslim pilgrims

Keen Muslim Saffie Gaye was thrilled when she discovered she had won a dream prize – a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Mecca. Her lucky scratch-card had been drawn for a special 'Hajj Package' prize offered to Gambians in a wave of lottery fever sweeping this predominantly Muslim country.

But not everyone was pleased for her. Devout Muslims strongly oppose all forms of gambling, and the idea that the annual Hajj pilgrimage – one of the five pillars of the Islamic faith – to the Holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia could be linked to lottery is anathema. 'Lottery in general is an act of the devil,' said one ardent opponent, student Alieu Khan.


LOTTO GAMBIA
WIN UP TO
D20,000
INSTANTLY!
News Flash!!!
THE GAMBIA NATIONAL LOTTERY
Win Up To D200,000 Instantly
LOTTO GAMBIA
This week's winning numbers:
NEW JACK POT FOR THIS WEEK:

Lottery fever in the Gambia: newspaper advertisement.

Nonetheless, despite a long-established law prohibiting gambling in the Gambia, the Kanefing and Banjul councils run the National Lottery Company as a means of raising much-needed cash for the community kitty. It offers prizes ranging from a few *dalasis* ($1=9.85 *dalasis*) to 200,000, as do two other lottery operations in the country – the privately-run Lotto Gambia and the hugely successful 'Joni Joni' scratch-cards.

There are Joni Joni agents all over the country, in bars and shops, where crowds of young hopefuls gather, frantically scratching at their cards. Co-director of the scratch-card company, Tuzhar Shah, counters criticism by pointing out that since its launch at the end of 1995, Joni Joni has handed out 900,000 *dalasis* as winnings, paid 500,000 *dalasis* in tax and made several charitable donations.

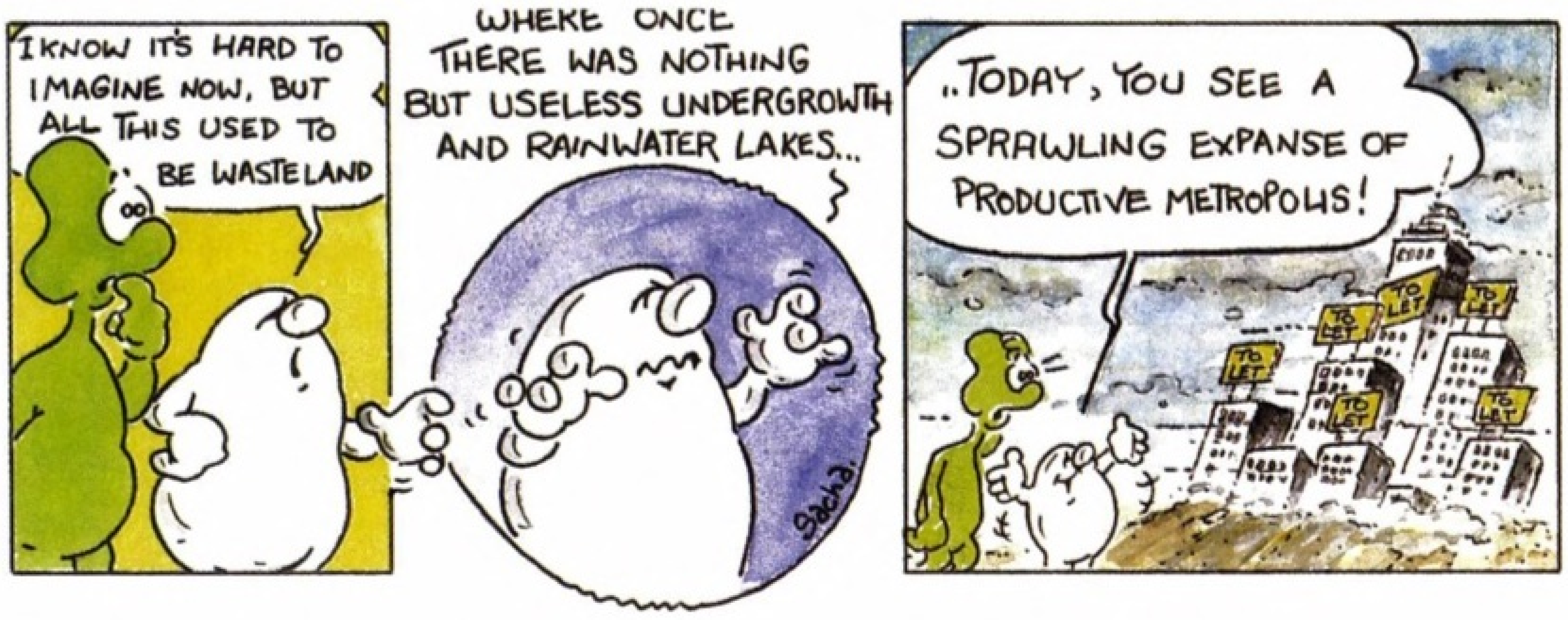
The controversy over whether or not the practice is healthy or acceptable reached its peak over the Hajj prize. At the end of the Muslim fast of Ramadan in February, all winners of the smaller, 100-*dalasi* Joni Joni prizes were automatically put forward for the draw for the 'Hajj Package' – a trip normally offered by travel agents at about 30,000 *dalasis*.

The winner, Saffie Gaye, had no troubled conscience. She had not gambled: a relative had bought the scratch-card as a surprise for her. Upon accepting the prize, she said: 'I'm declaring Joni Joni a passion in my home.'

Although the five-*dalasi* ticket fee is equivalent to the amount an average family would spend on a fish dinner, the National Lottery's banners lure punters with dreams of 'a new home, a new car, travel abroad', and even 'the chance to become a millionaire overnight' – even though the top prize is nowhere near a million *dalasi*. To soothe pricked consciences, government officials insist that buying lottery tickets is not gambling. ■

Rosemary Long / Gemini News Service

Chlorophyll by Sacha


I KNOW IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE NOW, BUT ALL THIS USED TO BE WASTELAND
WHERE ONCE THERE WAS NOTHING BUT USELESS UNDERGROWTH AND RAINWATER LAKES...
..TODAY, YOU SEE A SPRAWLING EXPANSE OF PRODUCTIVE METROPOLIS!
TO LET
Sacha

DAVID CONSTANTINE / PANOS PICTURES

Access for disabled people depends on act being implemented.

Right direction

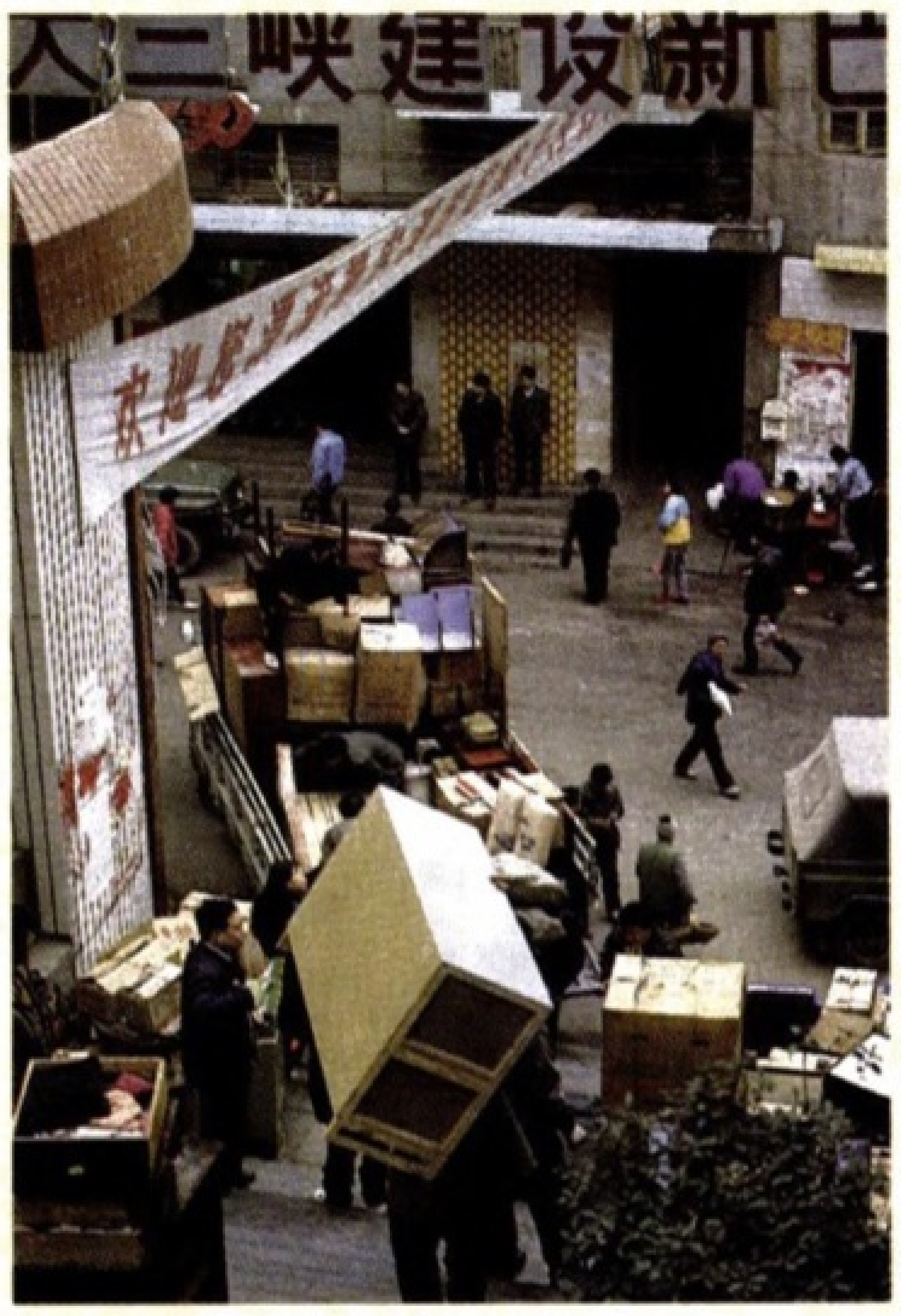
A new act on disabled people's rights and anti-discrimination measures has been passed unanimously by both Houses in India. The act covers education, issues of physical access and employment quotas. The non-party-political Disabled Rights Group played a key role in introducing the Bill in Parliament. The act could be of great benefit to disabled people in India, though much will depend on effective implementation.

Disability Awareness in Action, No 36

Flood money

More than 60 environmental and developmental groups from around the world have sent Prime Minister Jean Chrétien a letter protesting at Canadian Government financing for the Three Gorges Dam on China's Yangtze River. The Export Development Corporation recently agreed to lend $12.5 million to the Chinese Government towards their purchase of a $35 million computer system from Ontario-based Moneco-AGRA. The computer system will help the Chinese authorities to relocate forcibly more than one million people. Canada is the lone supporter of the project. Dam builders worldwide have all refused to get involved. Even the World Bank has warned that the current design is not economically viable.

Probe International

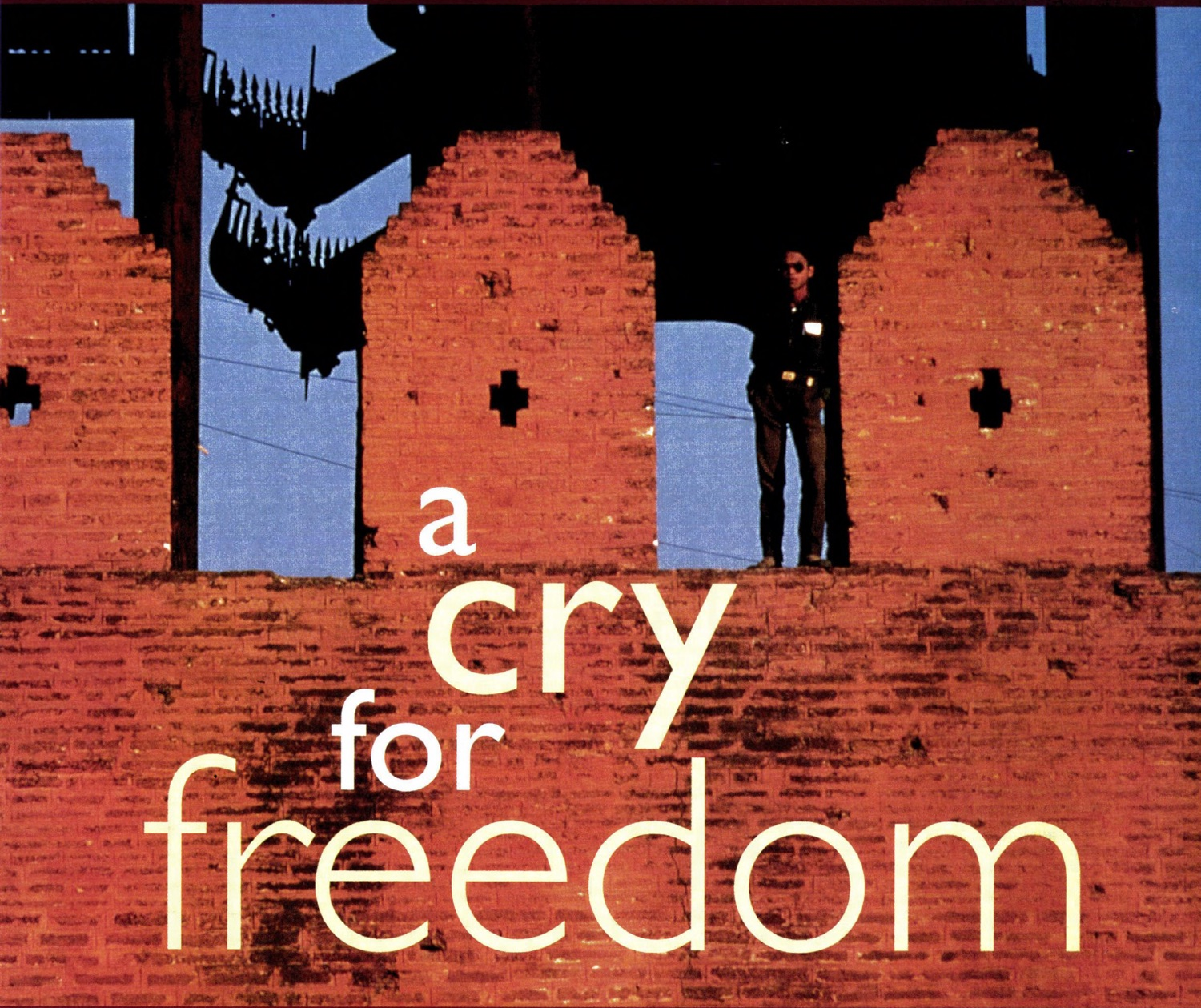


Rising tide: residents cleaned out.

Quote

'When I'm caught in traffic I think, when I was president this never happened.'

Corazon Aquino, taking a rosy view of her days in power in the Philippines.



a cry for freedom

RANDI BAIRD

Burma has one of the worst human-rights records in the world. But its ruling junta is keen to present a new face to the world. **John Pilger** goes to Burma and discovers the terrible human price its people are paying for that new face.

ARRIVING in Burma, the facades are almost normal: traffic in the streets of Rangoon, crowds in the markets and tea stalls, astrologers announcing the future at the great Shwedagon pagoda; families playfully dousing small ivory Buddhas in water. In the botanical gardens, where people go to speak freely, a young man seated on the bench next to me stared at his book, the pages unturned, before summoning the courage to speak – then looked away as he did. Strangely, he began each sentence with a verb, making our conversation at times hilarious. 'Permitting us never English', he said as he described the long ban, now lifted, on learning English. That was one of the old tyrant Ne Win's specialities, he said; another was his infamous cancellation of most of

The Novotel hotel – room-rates $200-$650; Burmese worker – average income $250 a year.

A HERNANDEZ / LIAISON / FRANK SPOONER PICTURES

the banknotes in circulation thus ruining most people with savings. As we talked, I became aware of a face in sun-glasses peering through the iron railings, the lips silently moving through a half-smile. My friend's face tightened and he hurried away without saying goodbye. Prague used to be like this.

The golden dusks bring a less ambiguous atmosphere. Colonial colonnades frame people motionless before they move on quickly. The only cyclo driver dismounts and slips into the shadows. 'It is common,' said an informant, 'for people to be kidnapped at night and never be seen again. Cyclo drivers have been taken away to become porters for the army, pack animals with ammunition and sometimes human mine-sweepers. You never know when it will happen; there is no pattern.'

Milan Kundera once wrote that the 'struggle of people against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting'. Few outside Burma will know about the epic events here between 1988 and 1990. Few will have heard of the White Bridge on Inya Lake in the centre of Rangoon, now known to foreign business people as the site of an 'international business centre'. Yet it was here that an uprising as momentous as the storming of the Berlin Wall 1989 was sparked. On 18 March 1988 hundreds of schoolchildren and students marched along it, singing the national anthem. It was as joyful as it was defiant. When suddenly they saw behind them the steel helmets of the *Lon Htein*, the 'riot police', and knew they were trapped.

According to eye-witnesses I have interviewed in exile, the soldiers systematically beat many of them to death, singling out the girls. 'A soldier reached down to his victim,' I was told, 'put his boot on her head and ripped the gold chain from her neck'. A few managed to escape into the lake where they were caught and beaten and drowned. Of those who survived 42 were locked in a waiting van, parked in the noonday outside Insein prison where they suffocated to death. At the White Bridge fire-engines were brought in to wash away the blood.

'it is common for people to be kidnapped at night and never be seen again...'

The students now marched in anger to the centre of the city and were joined by some 10,000 ordinary people who probably, until then, could not have imagined such a challenge to the military dictatorship that had ruled for 26 years. After months of rising popular confidence, the moment of general uprising came precisely at eight minutes past eight on the morning of the eighth day of the eighth month of 1988. This was the auspicious time the dockers chose to go on strike, and the country followed: teachers, journalists, railway workers, weather forecasters, grave-diggers, even prison warders and police.

Martin Moorland was British ambassador at the time. 'It was unforgettable and so very moving,' he said. 'All you could see were people and all you could hear was *Do-a-ye! Do-a-ye!* – "our country is our business". I had seven years of experience in Burma and I have to say I was astonished by the events of 1988. There was a degree of repression in the Burmese system which I thought the Burmese people took for granted and I discovered in 1988 they did nothing of the kind. My assumptions had been wrong. They wanted the same human rights, broadly speaking, as we want in the West.'

Unlike the bloody response to China's democracy movement in Tainanmen Square the following year, there were no TV cameras linked to satellite dishes when Ne Win kept his promise to 'shoot to kill those who stand against us'. As many as 10,000 died in the streets and in the prisons, under torture, and even in their homes as the army's feared Brengun-carriers stormed the crooked lanes, firing at random into flimsy homes. Anyone with a camera was a target. Perhaps the world only really took notice when a charismatic woman, Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of the national hero Aung San, was placed under house-arrest in July 1989. Thereafter, so the generals calculated, they could proceed with an election that, without her, they were certain to win and which would legitimize their dictatorship. In fact, they lost spectacularly; Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won 82 per cent of the Parliamentary seats; she even swept the board in principal army cantonments.

Shocked, the generals (who had renamed the regime the State Law and Order Council, known by its Orwellian moniker SLORC) threw most of the newly elected Parliament into prison and turned Burma into what Amnesty has described as 'a prison without walls'. Since then, year upon year, the United Nations Commission of Human Rights has translated Burma's tyranny into the following catalogue: 'Torture, summary and arbitrary executions, forced labour, abuse of women, politically motivated arrests and detention, forced displacement, important restrictions on the freedoms of expression and association and oppression of ethnic and religious minorities...' One report that drew me to Burma earlier this year was by Human Rights Watch which said that despite the release of Aung Sang Suu Kyi from house arrest in July last year, 'the overall human-rights situation is worsening... As the SLORC has moved to attract international investment at least two million people have been forced to work for no pay under brutal conditions to rebuild Burma's long-neglected infrastructure.'

The euphoria following the release of Aung San Suu Kyi was extremely important to the regime. In the House of Commons the Foreign Minister Jeremy Hanley said: 'The welfare of the Burmese people continues to concern us [but Suu Kyi's release] represents the first step in an irreversible pursuit of progress towards a prosperous and democratic Burma.' Although he counselled against 'moving too quickly', the British Government was 'heartened' and 'encouraged' by the SLORC's conciliatory gestures. Furthermore, the Burmese people could only 'gain experience of democratic principles' from 'increased commercial contacts with democratic nations such as Britain'. Running down the list of the regimes exposed to 'democratic principles' of British companies – Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Nigeria, not to mention Iraq and Iran – you could get a pretty good grasp of the true meaning of his verbiage.

Having opened Burma to the 'free market' and released its most famous prisoner, the SLORC bargained that the rapacious instincts of the 'Asian tiger' states and the venerable plunderers of the West would respond with the investment it craved. The SLORC was not disappointed. The British Government mounted a trade conference in London – 'Burma: the next tiger?' – funded by the Department of Trade, which was told about the 'visionaries' in the SLORC. This was followed by a business delegation to Rangoon, inspired and partly funded by the Government. (Britain's Premier Oil already had a $30 million investment and Powergen and Rolls Royce were 'very interested'.)

Immediately Aung San Suu Kyi was released the Japanese Government restored some $50 million in aid. The new Australian deputy prime minister, Tim Fischer, who had previously announced that 'democracy is coming' to Burma, said that Australia could now adopt a 'flexible' approach to a country that offered 'great economic opportunities'. The US Government, in spite of a certain sound and fury by its representative at the UN, said it would continue 'neither to encourage nor discourage' trade and investment.

However, by far the biggest investment was already well established: a one-billion-dollar pipeline being built by the French oil company Total, partly owned by the French Government, and its US partner UNOCAL. This will carry Burma's natural gas into Thailand and give the generals an estimated $400 million every year for 30 years. Indeed, more than two thirds of the SLORC's foreign underwriting now comes from foreign oil companies. Potentially, tourism, the world's fastest-growing industry, promises to complement this, if not in Visit Myanmar[1] Year 1996 then when the country's roads, railways, bridges and airports are rebuilt.

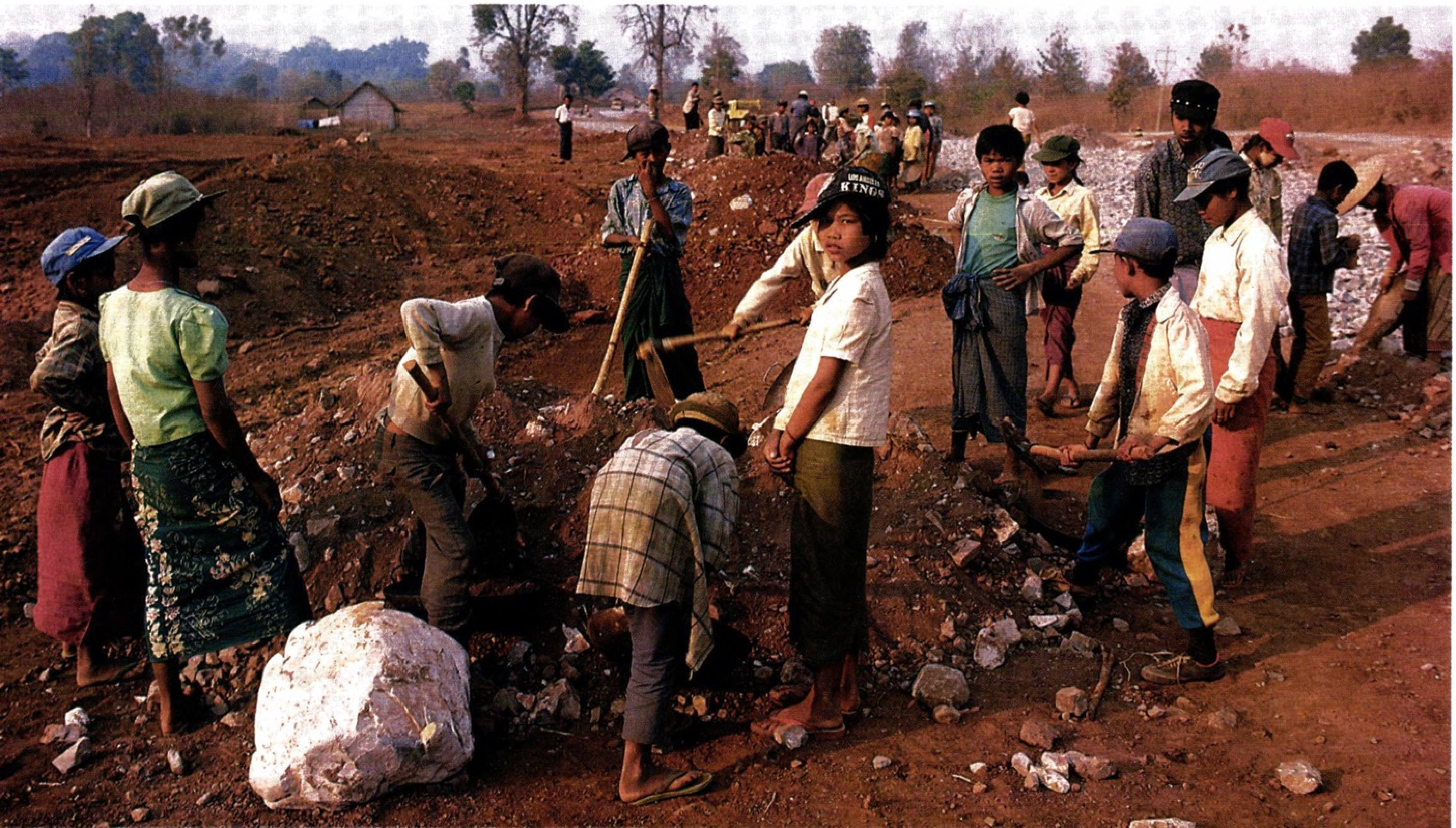
Scheming despots are, of course, nothing new. What sets SLORC-run Burma apart is slave labour and massive displacement of whole sections of the population. No modern state, whatever its totalitarian stripe, has turned itself into a vast slave labour camp in order to 'develop'. Certainly, Pol Pot tried it as a means of control, but none matches the SLORC in paving its way to 'the market' with such brutal audacity. If the generals are allowed to succeed in this project – and their important allies like Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia have been promoting 'constructive engagement' (a euphemism borrowed from the Reagan administration's support for the apartheid regime in South Africa) – they will command a pool of labour that will undercut the cheapest in Asia. This will attract capital and eventually loans will be granted by the World Bank and the IMF; and 'globalization' will mark another gain and humanity another loss.

Little of this has been news. 'I'm afraid,' Aung San Suu Kyi told me, 'countries and events keep slipping from the headlines, and we slipped'. She has asked investors and tourists to stay away, pointing out that the foreign exchange they bring will widen the gulf between rich and poor and reinforce the power of the SLORC. 'It is just not possible,' she said, 'for foreign visitors, on a short guided trip, to know the truth, if they are interested in the truth'.

'there are people serving tens of years in prison for writing poems and songs about freedom...'

The famous picturesque view from Mandalay hill is testament to this. On one side is the new white Novotel Hotel, whose brochure boasts 'a computer socket, multi-channel in-house music and TV, a fitness centre and an 18-hole golf course'. Room rates range from $200 to $650 (a Burmese family has to survive on around $200 a year). Facing it across a landscape of pagodas is another white building, a maximum-security prison where there are people

Children as young as nine years old are forced to build roads and railways for the military junta. Hundreds of such forced labourers have lost their lives.


PIERS CAVENDISH / IMPACT

serving tens of years for writing poems and songs about freedom. Beyond this, and a Foster's Lager billboard, is a shrine, which I watched being built with forced labour. I explained to an Australian tourist enjoying the golden sunset. 'I would never have known that,' he said.

Indeed, few foreigners, if any, will be aware that a thousand people were recently thrown out of the village they occupied for generations near Lashio in Shan State, so that the army could extend the golf-course for tourists. Dumped at gun-point on land that is dry stubble, where it is not possible even to sink a well, they can a only watch helplessly as their precious water sprays the greens of a new gold course. This is not unusual. Last year, in order to bring Rangoon's main golf course up to standard for rich foreigners – mostly Japanese investors – the army seized adjacent land where a community lived for 40 years. When an army blockade failed to make them move, one member of each family was arrested and taken to prison. The rest were driven in trucks to a 'satellite town' 15 miles away.

D FAULDER / B BANGKOK / IMPACT

Having their cake and eating it: a rare photo of SLORC officials at work. These worthies are from the 'Press Release Committee'.

The full force of these events struck me in the deep south of Burma, in Mon State, where David Munro and I found what has been described as the 'second death railway'. Connecting the towns of Ye and Tavoy, it is an extension of the notorious line built by the Japanese with the lives of more than 100,000 Asians and Allied prisoners of war. We came upon it in dense jungle beyond a village where emaciated young girls held out silver urns for contributions to the welfare of their community, a Buddhist tradition. Their face masks of *thanaka* – a yellow paste from treebark that protects and nourishes the skin – gave the appearance of small ghosts emerging from the undergrowth. They were fortunate compared with the gangs of children at work half a mile away.

While adult slave workers toiled on 20-foot embankments, the children were engaged in a crude brickworks, most of them exposed to the pre-monsoon glare and heat. Their ages ranged from teens down to nine years old. A ten-year-old boy was employed in a hole beneath a clay-mixer, turned by two yoked buffalo. His size was crucial; an adult would not be able to do his job, which was to catch the cement-like clay as it oozed out of the grinder, in time to be collected in a barrow. There was an urgent rhythm about his movements: there had to be; if he faltered the clay would bury him. As we approached him a barrow-load fell sideways onto him and I had to intervene to free him. One estimate is that, out of 200,000 adults and children forced to build the railway, up to 300 have died from exhaustion and disease or have been killed. This seems conservative. We counted some 20 bridges in the area and children appeared to be working on all of them. 'No one can escape [forced labour],' one villager told me. 'SLORC officials or the army go from village to village. They take a child, as long as he is strong enough, without asking permissions of the parent.'

In one of its recent annual reports on human-rights abuse throughout the word, the US State Department says the SLORC 'routinely' uses slave labour and 'will use the new railways to transport soldiers and construction supplies into the pipeline area'. The oil companies deny the railway is linked to the pipeline project, and although most supplies are likely to arrive by sea, there can be no doubt that the railway will allow the generals to protect the companies' investment and their own cut from it. In 1993 Total was contacted by officials of the Burmese Government in exile, representing Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy. They provided the company with extensive evidence of slave labour along the route of the pipeline. They also demonstrated how the profits from the project would invariably buy the arms and military equipment to which about half of the SLORC's budgetary spending is devoted, thus helping to underwrite the repression of the population. Total's response was it would 'continue'. UNOCAL has described reports of slave labour as 'fabrications'.

None of this would be possible without the collaboration of the Thai Government, especially the Thai military whose Petroleum Authority will be the only importer and consumer of the gas. The deal is little different from the logging, mining and fishing concessions which Thai interests have negotiated with Rangoon since 'development' in their own country has all but destroyed its principal natural resources. Part of the unspoken deal appears to be that the Thai military sends back Burmese refugees. In April 1993 Thai troops burned down two refugee camps in an operation, reported the Bangkok *Nation*, 'probably related to the gas pipeline'. Thousands of ethnic Mon refugees have since been forced back into Burma, many straight into the hands of the SLORC military. On the border, where the pipeline will enter Thailand, SLORC troops display Total pens in their uniforms. 'Total is coming,' said one of them, with a broad smile.

Desmond Tutu – like Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel peace Laureate – has said: 'International pressure can change the situation in Burma. Tough sanctions, not "constructive engagement" finally brought about a new South Africa. This is the language that must be spoken with tyrants, for it is the only language they understand.' What is hopeful is that there is the promise of sanctions, coming not initially from governments but from a remarkable grassroots disinvestment movement in the United States. Modelled on the campaign to boycott apartheid South Africa, selective purchasing laws have been enacted by several American cities, including San Francisco.

These prevent public funds going to companies that trade with or invest in Burma. At the time of writing, New York State is likely to enact similar legislation and one of the biggest investors in Burma, Pepsi Cola, is withdrawing. The threat is not only loss of profits, but bad publicity, especially when applied to a company like Pepsi that says its product is 'bringing people and nations closer together towards world peace'. Byron Rushing, who has written a selective purchasing law for the state of Massachusetts, told me: 'In the case of South Africa, we were able to put pressure on a whole range of companies like General Motors, Coca-Cola, Pepsi Cola, and eventually most withdrew. And that really added to the pressure on the white South African government. That was a victory. As for Burma, it's not going to happen overnight, but we have started. The civilized world should follow.' ■

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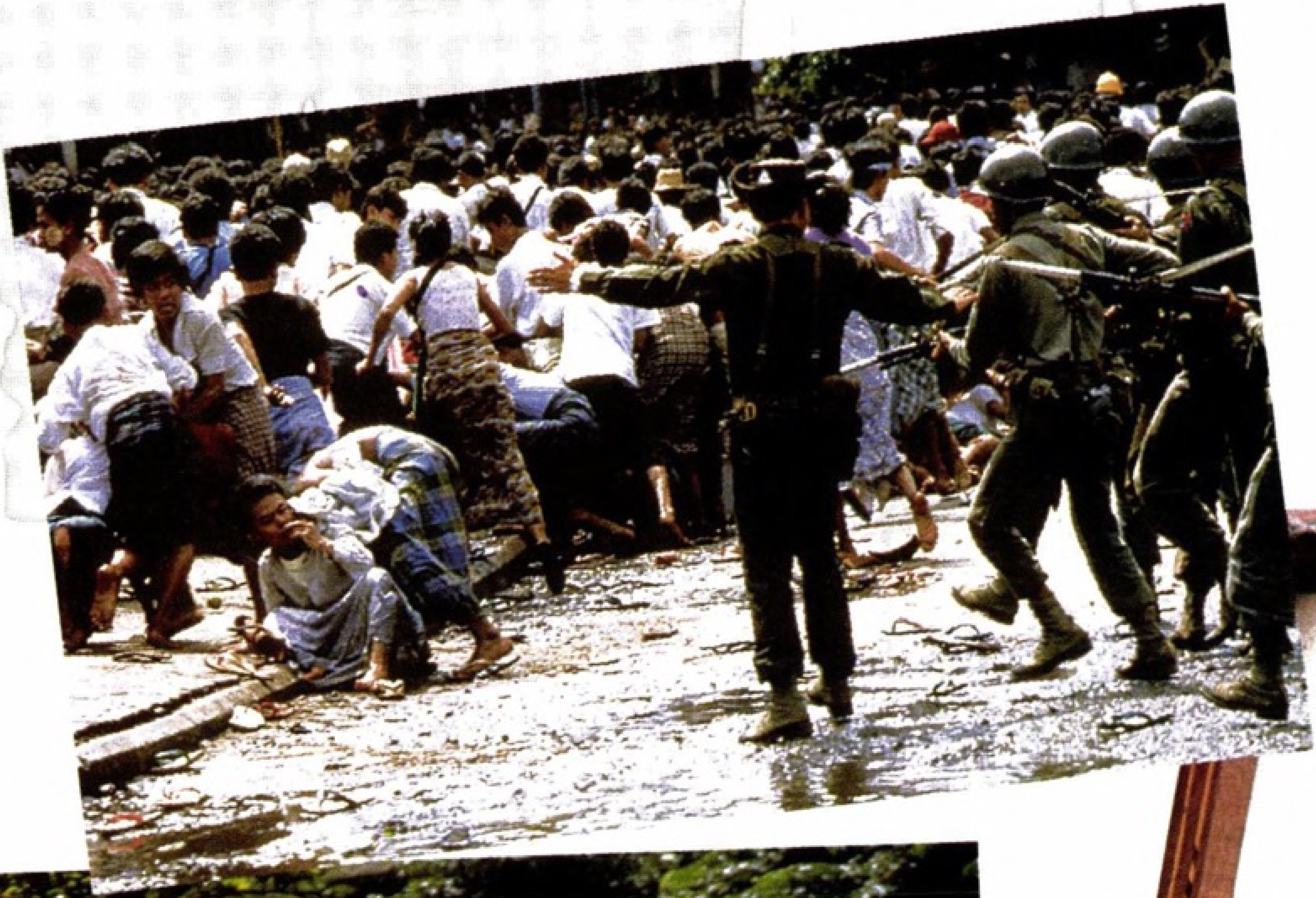
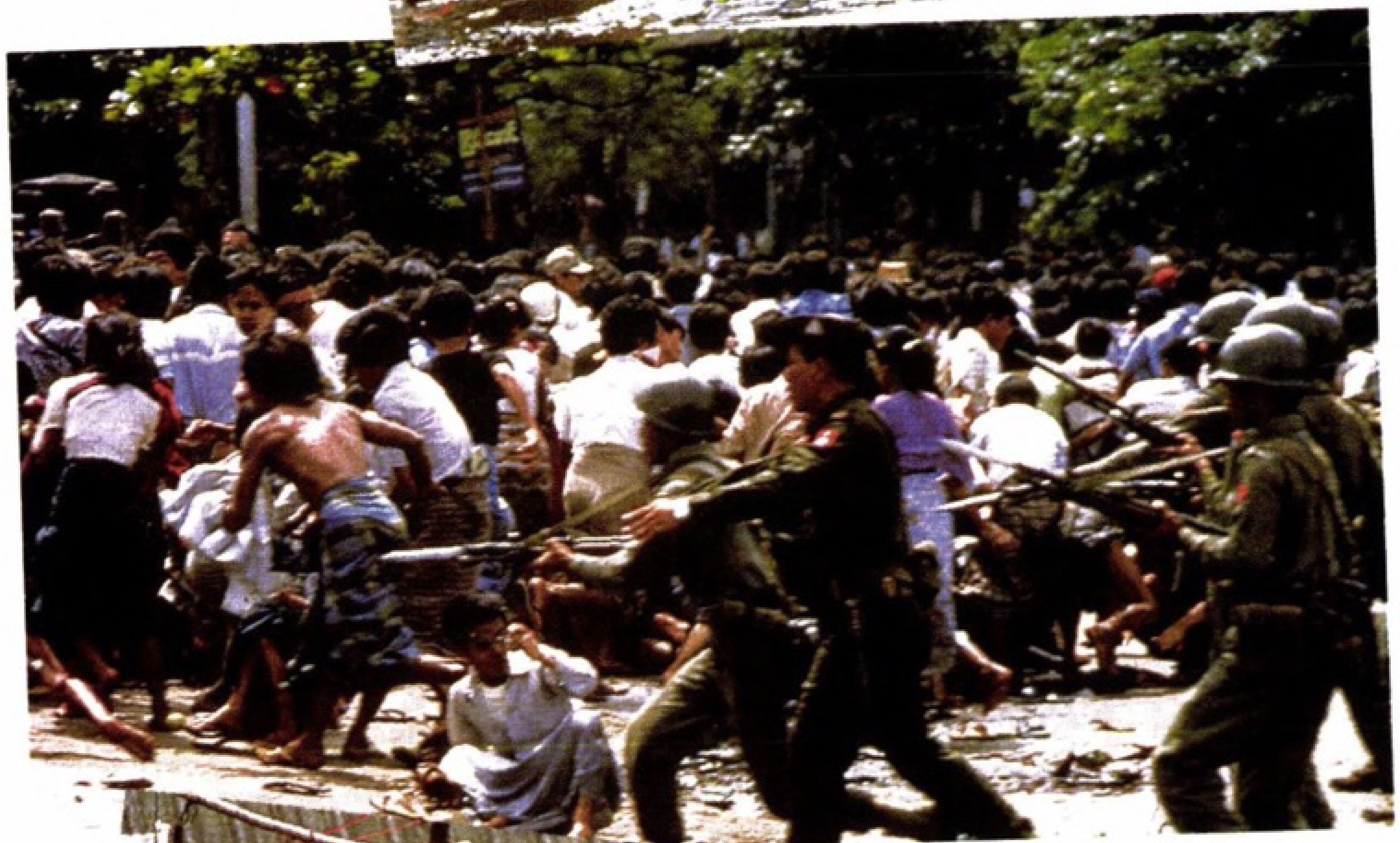
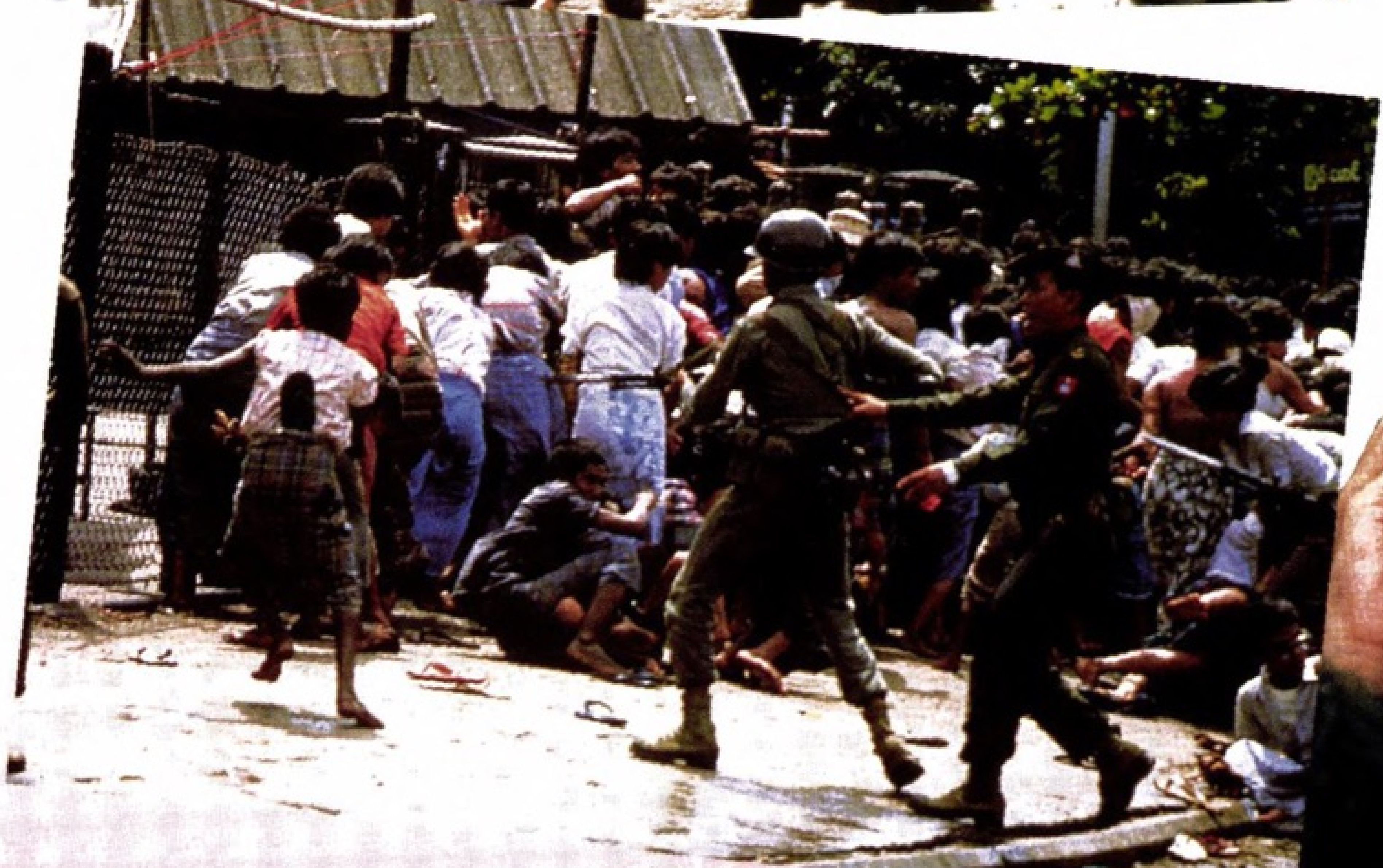
1. In June 1989 the SLORC renamed Burma 'Myanmar'.

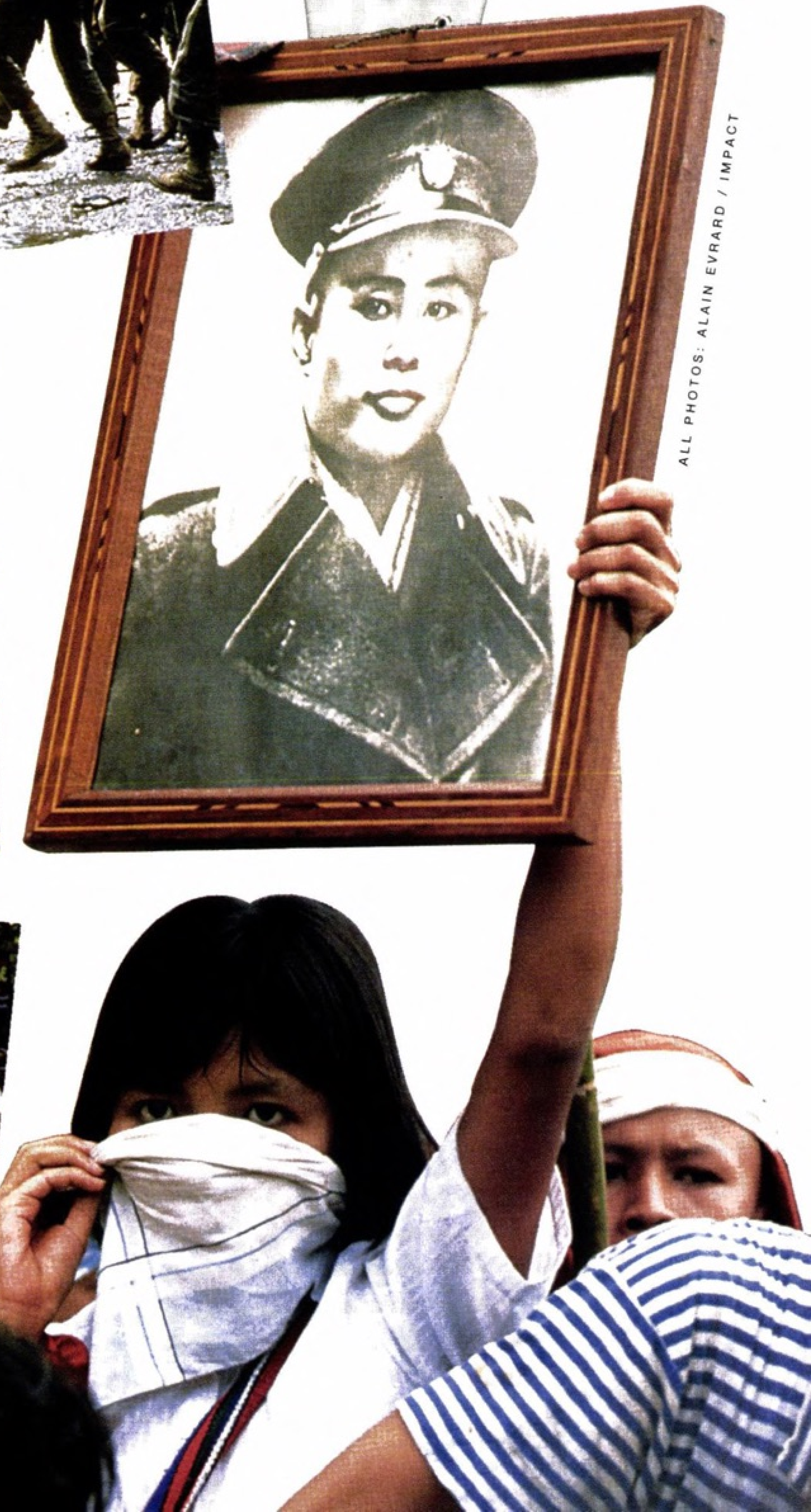
Uprising!

In the summer of 1988 the people of Burma demanded democracy – and got bullets. An estimated 10,000 civilians died in the bloodbath that ensued. Photographer Alain Evrard captured the terrible moment when the military turned their guns against peaceful, unarmed demonstrators, some of them carry photographs of independence hero Aung San, in the streets of Rangoon.









ALL PHOTOS: ALAIN EVRARD / IMPACT

Slave nation

Few in SLORC's Burma can escape the cruelties and indignities of slavery. A civil servant tells his story...

I WAS A GOVERNMENT SERVANT responsible for searching out coalmines for the Department of Geological Survey and Mineral Exploration, when I got a letter from my mother in December 1995. She wrote that she was unwell; she had cancer of the uterus and begged me to come back home to Tavoy in case she died.

As the eldest son I have responsibility to look after my mother and four younger sisters. So I submitted my resignation from the Department and applied for a pension. I arrived home in late December and stayed there until March when I was ordered to do two weeks forced labour on the railroad. I had to bring enough food to provide for myself during this time.

'Later I learned that they let young girls rest for a few days in exchange for sleeping with them...'

The work began at 6.00 am and went on till evening. We had to get up at 4.00 and cook rice to take with us because the worksite was several miles away. Each day we had to cut 50 bamboo canes and 20 pillars.

There were also prisoners working with us on the site and while we stopped to have our lunch they had to carry on working, pulling huge, heavy rollers in order to flatten the ground. Those prisoners worked like buffaloes. Sometimes the roller was so heavy it just wouldn't budge. Then the soldiers would beat the prisoners with huge canes, drawing blood. And the prisoners were not allowed to have a drop of water or a mouthful of food until it was time for them to have a meal.

There were vendors who came to sell us food which only those with money could buy.

Sometimes the soldiers gave the workers alcohol – but in exchange they would have to do even more work. If the workers got drunk and fell down they would be left there, in the forest, overnight where they would catch cold or fever. And to punish them further they were denied medical treatment and forced to carry on working. That's not all: they were shackled too.

I came down with malaria and had to go to the health centre to buy some tablets. They helped me feel better, but the fever returned. When I went back to the health centre they refused to give me a day's medical leave and told me to get back to work. I did so, but I felt terrible. I could hardly stand and eventually I collapsed. Luckily, the supervisor was sympathetic and sent me back to the camp to rest.

When I got there I saw three soldiers with two young women who seemed to be virgins. The girls put their sarongs on immediately they saw me. I also saw the captain put his trousers on. Later I learned that they would let young girls rest for a few days in exchange for sleeping with them. The girls would sleep with them for a week and then they were given some money and allowed to go home.

Blood in the water

I completed my duty as a 'voluntary servant' on the railroad and went home to Tavoy – only to be called by the area headman to serve as a porter. He said that one man per household had to serve. When I asked him whether, as a government servant, I should be required to serve as a porter he replied: 'If you can't do it, I'll take your mother and your sisters.' I was very upset by this, so I agreed to go.

I was sent to Myoma Police Station where I was locked up, together with all the other porters. There were 370 of us – from four townships – and that afternoon we were taken away in seven trucks. We were sent up to Yebyu and were dropped at

MATHIAS HENG

Regiment No 407. I tried to make friends with the soldiers, giving them cheroots and asking them their names.

When we arrived at Yebyu we were again locked up and not given any food or water. We were not even allowed to go to the toilet. Eventually, I knocked on the door from inside and said to a guard: 'Master, I want to pass stools and urine, what shall I do?'

'You just stay there,' was his answer.

Then he passed me a plastic carrier bag and said: 'Do it in the bag.'

In the evening some soldiers' wives came to sell us noodles, snacks and bottles of alcohol. There were also some people offering to act as locum porters, but they wanted 12,000 *kyats* to go in your place. You would get retired soldiers sometimes doing this work for money.

Those people could afford to buy food and drink, but the people who were forced to work could not afford food and many were starving.

Early the next morning we were sent to Sinma Camp. We had to carry heavy bundles on our backs and in our arms and sacks tied to our heads. When we got to the camp we had to stand in a row. 'Come on staff!' said the soldiers – they didn't call us 'porters', they called us 'staff'. We were then locked up in the barracks and given a plastic bag full of rice and soup to eat. When we had finished our meal we had to load up with rice sacks, artillery shells and ammunition and set off for Natyin Mountain. The terrain was rocky and some people fell down into the valleys. Others became ill.

One old man accidentally dropped his rice sack into a small river. The soldiers thought he was trying to escape so they shot him in the head. I could see the blood coming out of his bullet wound and the flow of the water was so fast that he was carried away by the river. Another man – over 60 years old – just couldn't carry his bag of rice any longer. He dropped it and as he did so his *longhi* (cloth wrapped round the waist) fell off. One of the captains pulled him up and beat him on the head with a huge cane. He was left with a gaping wound and forced to carry his sack again.

At the base of the Natyin Mountain the ground was being prepared for gas pipelines and we were forced to stop here and do some of the work. On the third day four or five Englishmen came. We completed our work and continued on our way.

'I could see the blood coming out of his bullet wound and the flow of the water was so fast that he was carried away by the river...'

Go ahead, shoot me

But by now we were getting short of food, so we had to go back to Sinma to get some more. We stayed there one night before coming back with the food. While I was carrying a rice sack my *longhi* fell off. To pick it up I had to drop my rice sack and for that I was beaten by a soldier. I told him he was young enough to be my kid brother and he shouldn't beat me. But he just beat me again. I tried to protect myself against him and he took aim at me with his gun. I told him to go ahead and shoot me if he wanted to but I wanted to see Lieutenant Colonel San Won first. The soldier dropped his gun and called the Lieutenant Colonel who asked: 'What's going on?' He pulled at my shirt and asked me whether I was a Karen. [One of Burma's many ethnic minority groups.]

The soldier who had beaten me said: 'Oh yes, yes, that bugger is a Karen.'

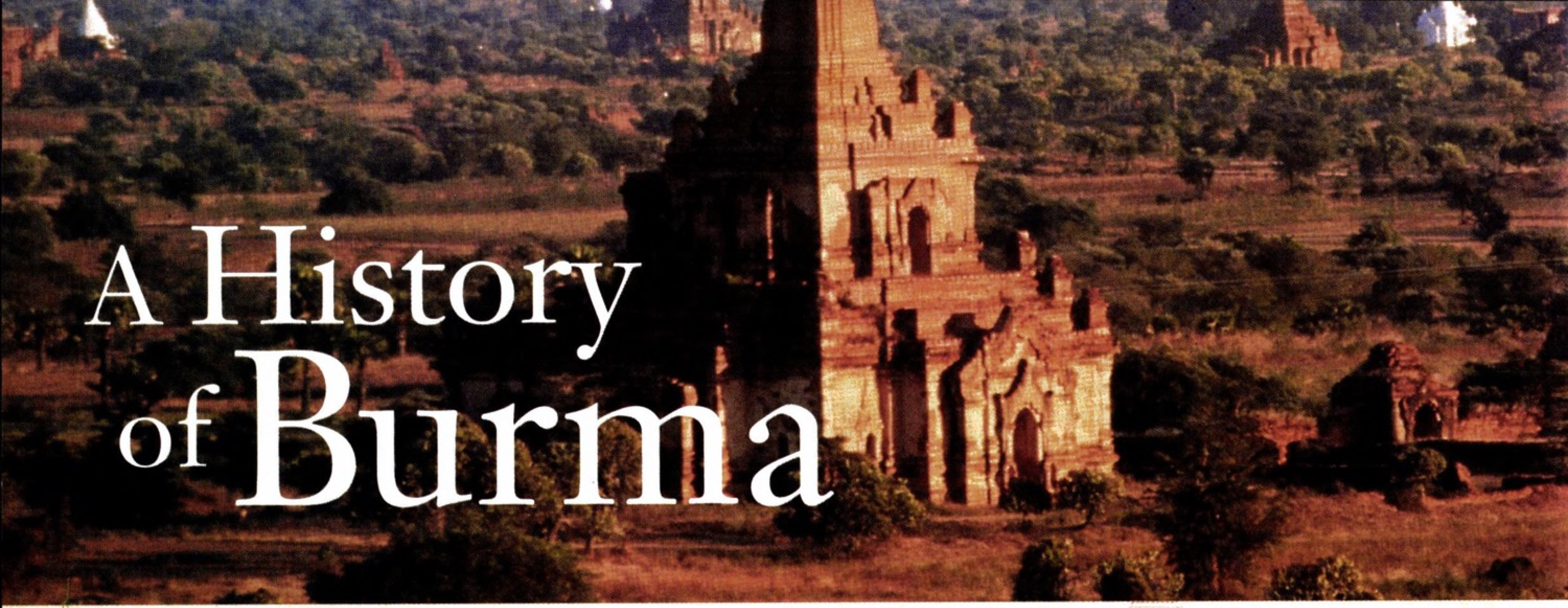
The Lieutenant Colonel said to me: 'You must be a Karen rebel officer.'

I replied: 'I am a Karen but I'm not a rebel and I'm not a rebel officer. I was put on the list of the porters unfairly by the local headman. Actually I am a government servant.' I showed him my card to prove I was on the staff of the Department of Geological Survey and Mineral Exploration.

He said: 'A government servant like you is not supposed to be a porter. You must go back. You can sleep with us tonight.'

After that I was asked to carry only two haversacks and a smaller rice sack. But I still wasn't released – even though they had promised me that I would be. A couple of days later there was some shooting. I heard that seven people had died, including some of the Englishmen we had seen at the gas pipeline site and a young Karen man. ■

Interviewed by **John Pilger**



A History of Burma

1

Four million pagodas

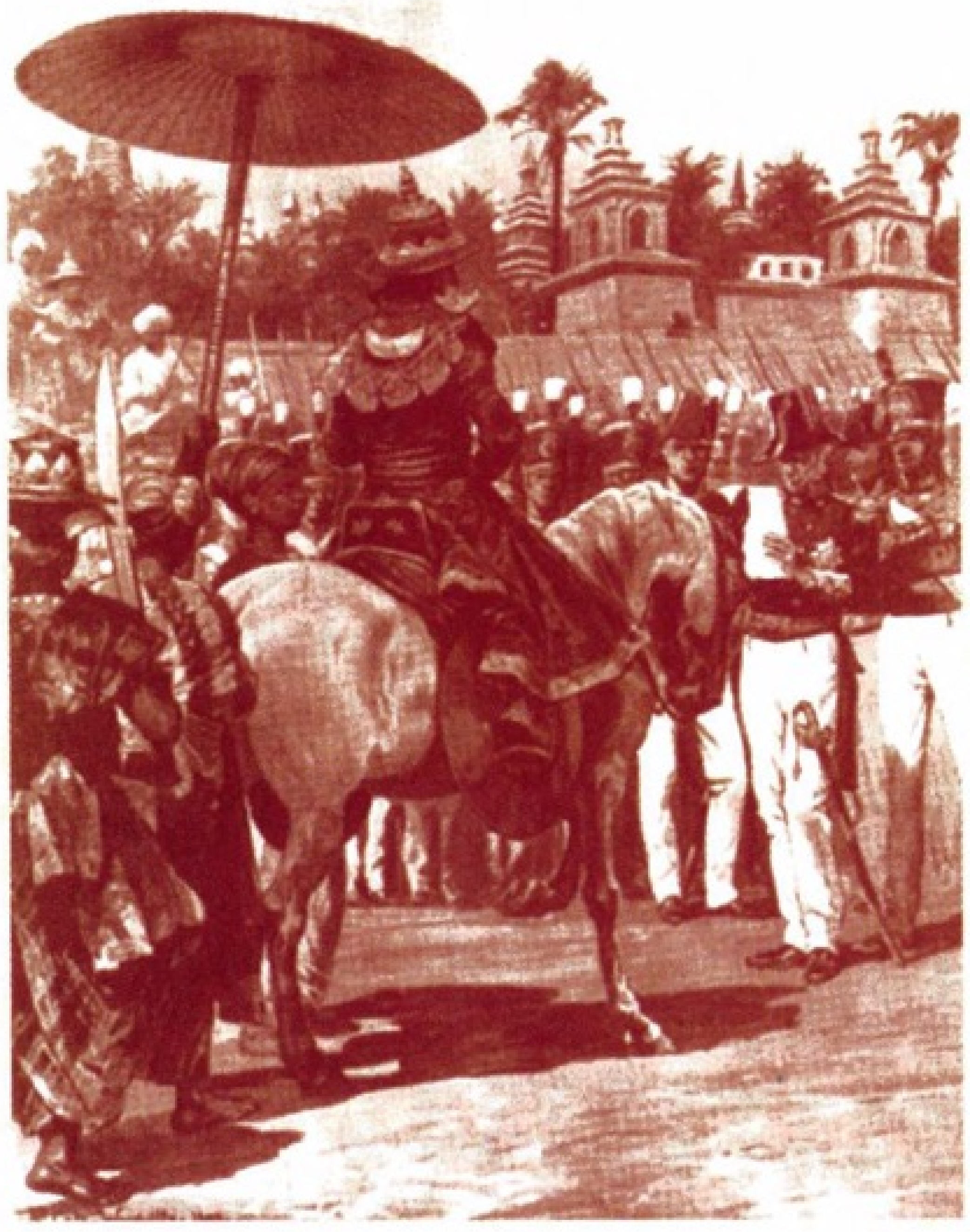
The nation we know as Burma was first formed during the golden age of Pagan in the eleventh century. King Anawrahta ascended the throne in 1044, uniting Burma under his monarchy. His belief in Buddhism led him to begin building the temples and pagodas for which the city of Pagan (above) is renowned. Pagan became the first capital of a Burmese kingdom that included virtually all of modern Burma. The golden age of Pagan reached its peak during the reign of Anawratha's successor, Kyanzitta (1084-1113), another devout Buddhist, under whom it acquired the name 'City of Four Million Pagodas'.

However, the megalomaniac temple-building activities of some later kings, combined with the enrichment of monasteries, were to impoverish the country and Burma became increasingly vulnerable to Mongol and Tartar incursions. But to this day Buddhism has remained at the heart of Burmese culture and 80 per cent of the population are followers.

British offences

2

Although Burma was at times divided into independent states, a series of monarchs attempted to establish their absolute rule, with varying degrees of success. Eventually, an expansionist British Government took advantage of Burma's political instability. After three Anglo-Burmese wars over a period of sixty years, the British completed their colonization of the country in 1886, taking the last of a long line of Burmese kings into custody. Burma was immediately annexed as a province of British India, and the British began to permeate the ancient Burmese culture with foreign elements (right). The British rulers trained the neighbouring Indians to take over civil-service jobs previously filled by Burmese. Burmese customs were often weakened by the imposition of British traditions. The British also encouraged both Chinese and Indians to migrate into Burmese cities in order to profit from new business opportunities. By the start of the First World War, colonial architecture had become prominent throughout Rangoon, and foreign religious monuments and practices grew alongside traditional forms of Burmese Buddhism. Rich in natural resources, Burma became known as 'the rice bowl of Asia'. It was in fact, the world's largest exporter of rice.

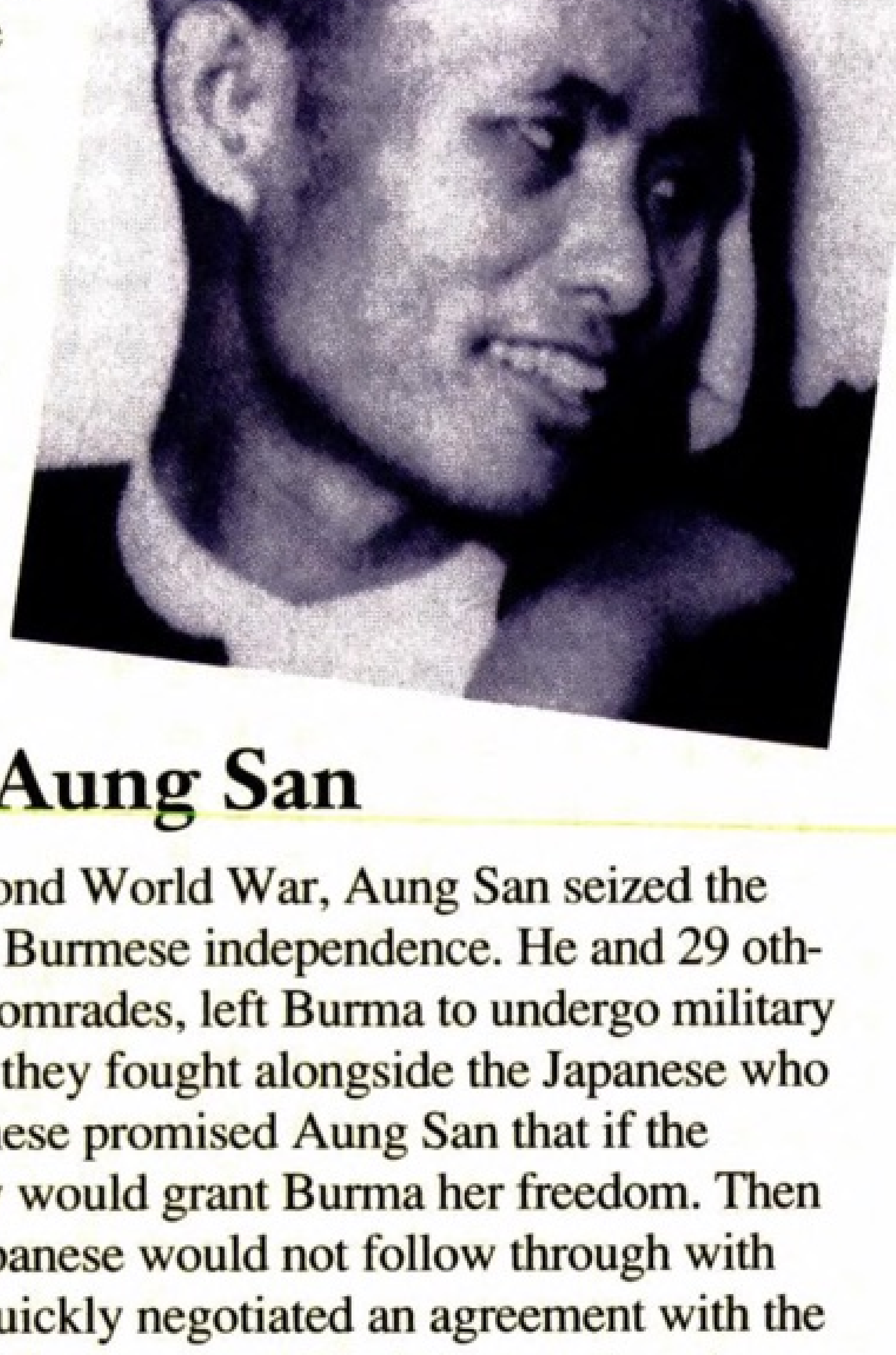


MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

Sparks of resistance

3

The British also further divided the numerous ethnic minorities by favouring some groups, such as the Karen, for positions in the military and in local rural administrations. During the 1920s, the first protests by Burma's intelligentsia and Buddhist monks were launched against British rule. By 1935, the Students Union at Rangoon University was at the forefront of what would evolve into an active and powerful movement for national independence. A young law student named Aung San (right), executive-committee member and magazine editor for the Students Union, emerged as the potential new leader of the national movement. In the years that followed, he successfully organized a series of student strikes at the university, gaining the support of the nation. To demonstrate his conviction that Burma was rightfully Burmese and not British, he and his closest associates defiantly called themselves *thakins*, or 'masters', which was a title previously used only for addressing the British.



4

A man named Aung San

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Aung San seized the opportunity to bring about Burmese independence. He and 29 others, known as the Thirty Comrades, left Burma to undergo military training in Japan. In 1941, they fought alongside the Japanese who invaded Burma. The Japanese promised Aung San that if the British were defeated, they would grant Burma her freedom. Then it became clear that the Japanese would not follow through with their promise, Aung San quickly negotiated an agreement with the British to help them defeat the Japanese. Working together, the British, Indians and Burma's Thirty Comrades successfully expelled the Japanese from Burma in May 1945.

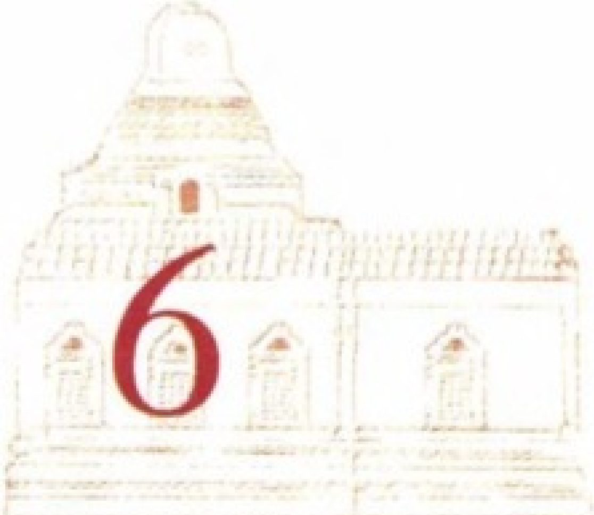
Hailed as the architect of Burma's new-found independence by the majority of the Burmese, Aung San was able to negotiate an agreement in January 1947 with the British, under which Burma would be granted total independence from Britain. An election was held to form an interim government, in which Aung San's party (the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League) won 248 of 255 assembly seats. Only 32 years old at the time, an eloquent and determined Aung San made an historic trip to London during this period of transition. Although a controversial figure to some ethnic minorities, he also had regular meetings with ethnic leaders throughout Burma in an effort to create reconciliation and unity for all Burmese.

HOWARD J DAVIES

5

Freedom and death

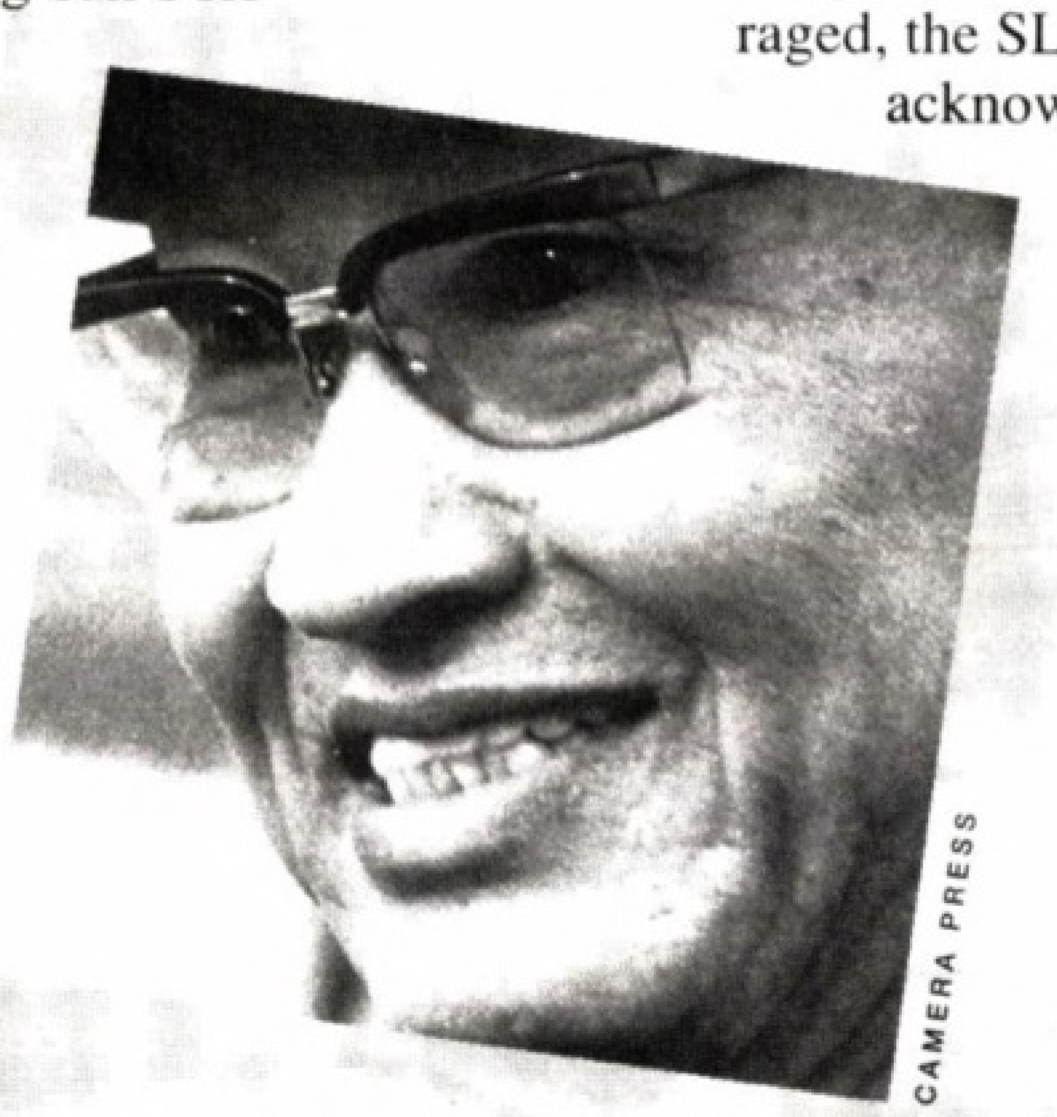
As the new leader drafted a constitution with his party's ministers in July 1947, the course of Burmese history was dramatically and tragically altered. Aung San and members of his newly formed cabinet were assassinated when an opposition group with machine guns burst into the room. The man responsible, motivated by political rivalry, was apprehended, tried and executed one year later. A member of Aung San's cabinet, U Nu, was delegated to fill the position suddenly left vacant by Aung San's death. Although the nation was shaken by this monumental loss, Burma was finally granted independence on 4 January 1948, at 4.20 am – a moment selected as the most auspicious by an astrologer.



6

Ne Win moves in

For the next ten years, Burma's fledgling democratic government was continuously challenged by communist and ethnic groups who felt under-represented in the 1948 constitution. Periods of intense civil war destabilized the nation. Although the constitution declared that minority states could be granted some level of independence in ten years, their long-awaited day of autonomy never arrived. As the economy floundered, U Nu was removed from office in 1958 by a caretaker government led by General Ne Win (right), one of Aung San's fellow *thakins*. Born Shu Maung, he had changed his name to Ne Win, meaning 'the sun of glory'. In order to 'restore law and order' to Burma, Ne Win took control of the whole country including the minority states, forcing them to remain under the jurisdiction of the central government. Although he allowed U Nu to be re-elected Prime Minister in 1960, two years later he staged a coup and solidified his position as Burma's military dictator.



CAMERA PRESS

7

Despotic ruin

Ne Win's new Revolutionary Council suspended the constitution and instituted authoritarian military rule. Full attention turned to the military defeat of communist and ethnic-minority guerrilla groups. The country was closed off from the outside world as the new despot promoted an isolationist ideology based on what he called the Burmese Way to Socialism. Superstitious, xenophobic and ruthless, for the next three decades Ne Win set a thriving nation on a disastrous path of cultural, environmental and economic ruin. Outside visitors were few and restricted to Rangoon, Mandalay and a handful of other tightly controlled towns close to the central plains. Insurgency remained endemic and in many areas of Burma armed struggle became a way of life.

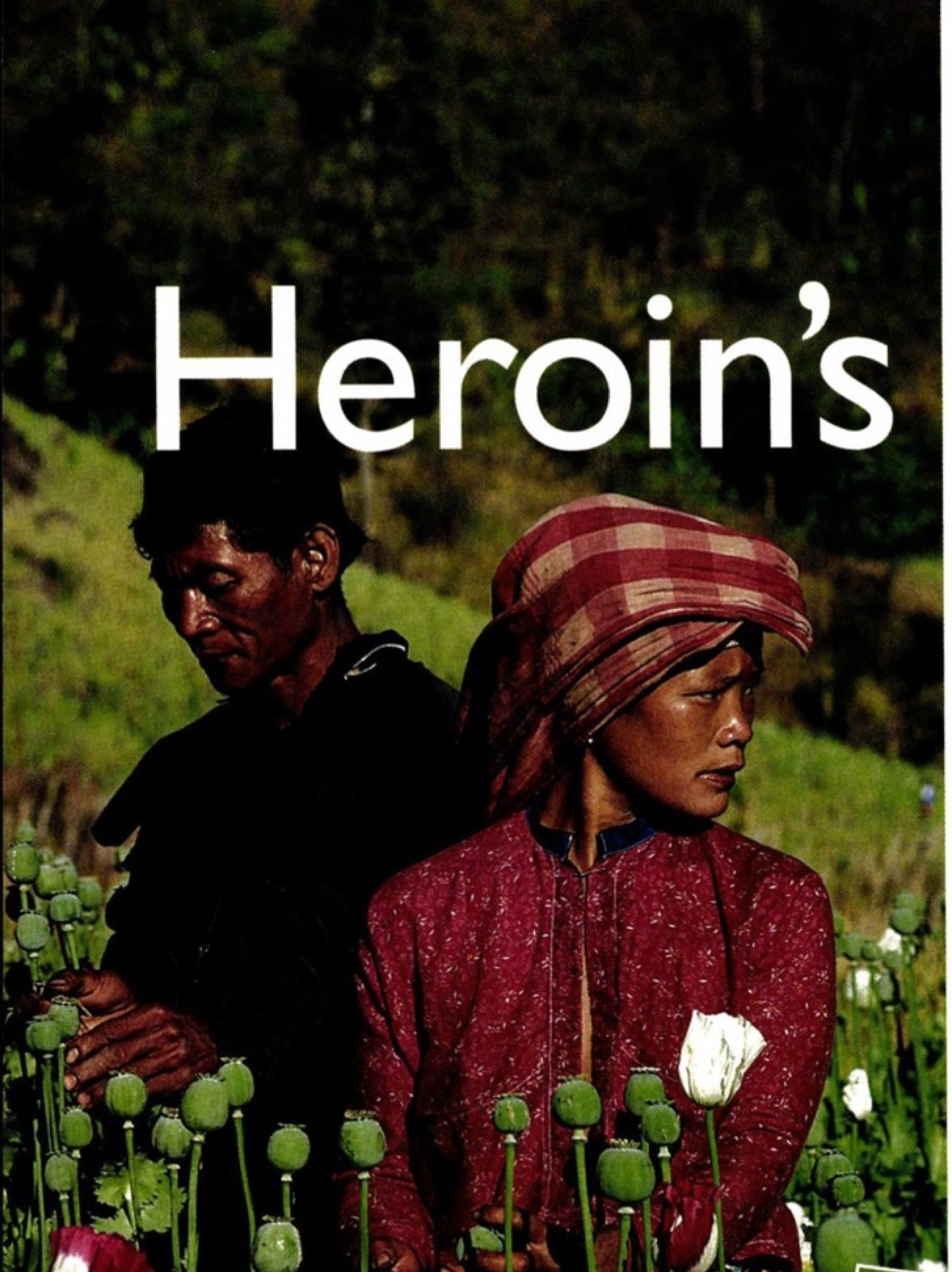
CLAUS-DIETER BRAUNS / CAMERA PRESS

8

The fight for democracy

In July 1988 Ne Win suddenly announced that he was preparing to leave the stage. Seeing at last a possible escape from military rule, economic decline and routine human-rights abuses, thousands of people took to the streets of Rangoon. Demonstrations broke out across the country during the so-called 'democracy summer' that followed. But on 8 August 1988 troops began a four-day massacre, firing into crowds of men, women and children gathered in Rangoon. At least 10,000 demonstrators were killed across the country. Thousands of students and others fled to the 'Liberated Areas' and forged alliances with ethnic resistance movements. Back in Rangoon Aung San Suu Kyi (below) – daughter of independence hero Aung San – began her public support for the struggle for democracy. Just when democratic changes seemed imminent Ne Win commandeered the army from behind the scenes to take over the country in a staged 'coup'. Control of the country was handed to a 19-member State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and a vicious crackdown followed. Although committed to non-violence, Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house-arrest in July 1989 for 'endangering the state' and kept there for the next six years. Multi-party elections were held in 1990, as the SLORC had promised, and Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party swept to victory. Surprised and outraged, the SLORC refused to acknowledge the election results and has retained its repressive grip on power since. ■

HOWARD J DAVIES



Heroin's hidden deals

Burma produces more than half the world's raw heroin. But who controls the lucrative drug trade now? **Faith Doherty** reports.

PIERS CAVENDISH / IMPACT

Opium warlord Khun Sa (below) has plenty to laugh about.

PIERS CAVENDISH / IMPACT

THE ANNOUNCEMENT made at the beginning of January 1996 that Burma's opium warlord Khun Sa had surrendered to the country's ruling junta caught virtually all parties by surprise. Since his surrender it has become clear – as suggested by many Burma-watchers over the years – that Khun Sa's departure will not greatly alter the situation. The fact that Burma supplies more than half of the world's heroin has never depended on one man or one organization.

In the United States 60 per cent of heroin sold on the streets originates from the Golden Triangle and the region has been a major focus of anti-narcotic agencies and governments for decades – with little apparent effect. The previous General Ne Win-led governments and the present SLORC junta have all approached the drug problem in Burma by playing a two-faced game: on one side requesting support from the West to eradicate drugs and do battle with Khun Sa, and on the other, doing lucrative deals with drug kingpins. And opium is Burma's most lucrative cash crop.

'If heroin continues to flow unabated onto the streets of New York, Los Angeles and Rangoon, there will be only one culprit now'

Now that the junta has secured military ceasefires with all ethnic rebel groups dependent on the opium economy for their survival, the surrender of Khun Sa should ensure that the spotlight again goes back on to Rangoon. But will it? Since Khun Sa's surrender, the junta has stated that it will militarily control the territory previously held by Khun Sa and his Mong Tai Army. The junta has further promised that there will be a 70-per-cent reduction in the flow of heroin from Burma now that the prime growing areas have 'joined the legal fold'. Time will tell. But given that the military have repeatedly reiterated their hatred for the 'notorious drug-lord Khun Sa', and that their past statements have ruled out both dialogue and any agreement with him or with the Mong Tai Army, such statements must be taken with more than a pinch of salt.

Khun Sa's Shan people are not alone in their struggle with warlords, the junta and dependence on the opium economy. Other ethnic nationalities, such as the Wa and Kokang, have long been involved in the cultivation of opium to fund their fight for independence from Rangoon. In the late 1980s both the Wa and Kokang concluded ceasefire agreements with Rangoon. Yet their cultivation and sale of opium continues essentially unchanged. The junta used military force to drive both ethnic groups to sign these ceasefire agreements – no significant political settlements have been made.

For years the US used Khun Sa as their big bogey of the Golden Triangle: Khun Sa was Public Enemy Number One. Other drug-lords in the area, meanwhile, have become more influential but have kept much lower profiles. Despite considerable evidence that other groups and individuals were involved in the multi-billion dollar industry, there were many who believed Khun Sa's capture would severely damage the flow of heroin. The logical next step for anti-narcotics officials was to work closely with the junta as the only way to have an impact on the export of heroin. This position failed to understand that the Shan people themselves saw their struggle not as a drug war but as a national struggle for self-determination. There is now an uncomfortable silence from those who pushed to empower the junta. Anti-narcotic officials are now forced to admit that Khun Sa's surrender is likely to have little or no impact on the flow of heroin.

Ethnic minorities (left) grow opium to fund their fight for independence.

FALISE / GENIER / FRANK SPOONER PICTURES

In 1989 and 1992 indictments were handed down in New York courts against Khun Sa. But after his surrender, the junta announced that it would not hand him over to US authorities for extradition and trial. The US responded by offering two million dollars for any information leading to his arrest. According to sources in Rangoon, the last thing the authorities would do is hand over the drug-baron. The reason is simple: he knows far too much and would be in a position to expose too many influential people, including junta members, involved in the trade.

Recent reports published through wire agencies in Bangkok revealed that Khun Sa has been paying a Burmese regional commander a monthly fee of around $5,000 a month (the average monthly wage for a Burmese citizen is under $25 a month). A 'large sum' of money was also paid to a Burmese army general, apparently in order to secure his surrender and peaceful retirement. Reports of this kind have not surfaced so openly in the past few years, but it is widely known that there are members of the authorities in Rangoon on the payroll of drug traders, including prominent past kingpins, such as Lo Hseing Han.

At the time of writing, it's harvest time for opium in Burma. Khun Sa is not there to send his men to pick, nor are the mule trains lined up to carry the crop through his territory to his refineries. What will happen to the thousands of tonnes of opium currently being picked by ethnic people, people who now depend entirely on the business that Khun Sa and others have created? With other drug dealers only too ready to step in, it is unlikely this vast harvest will go to waste. As for the junta, this is the time for them to show their sincerity about drug control.

Corrupt generals are an old story in Burma, but SLORC control of the Shan opium-growing regions is new. It is now up to the junta to turn off the heroin spigot, if this is their true intention. The world is waiting. If heroin continues to flow unabated onto the streets of New York, Los Angeles and Rangoon, there will be only one culprit now. We can only hope that Khun Sa's departure wakes up all those concerned with the Golden Triangle heroin problem to its only real solution: an end to the political crisis in Burma. ■

Faith Doherty is a Burma-watcher working with the Southeast Asian Information Network (SAIN) in Bangkok.

Villagers' story

Maung (not his real name) is a 36-year-old peasant farmer:

'It was understandable that the Japanese [during World War Two] forced us to do slave labour because they were foreigners. But now it's our own people who are treating us like slaves. We didn't agree to do it at all, but we had no right to refuse. We can't voice how we feel!

People died working on the railway while I was doing my forced labour there. Some died in landslides, some from fever. About five people died in one landslide while a hill was being bulldozed. Some of the bodies were found, some were not. Oh dear, oh dear, in some cases only part of the bodies were found! In some cases only a head was found, in some cases only a foot...

Oh, we want this cruel ruler to die!

When the bodies were found they weren't mourned properly with a funeral. If the friends or relatives wanted to take the body away and arrange a funeral, they could. Otherwise a hole was dug and the body was just left there.

Now there are three trains running along that stretch we worked on, from Yebyu to Ngweley.'

Min, in her early thirties, takes up the story:

'If there are no adults in a household available to go for forced labour and there is no money to pay a fine instead, then a child has to go. They have been building this railway for three years now so we have had to ask the children to go because it's so hard to get money these days. The children are often too young to anticipate danger and so they are the most vulnerable people working on the line. If there is danger they are the ones likely to die.

They told us that once this railway was completed the price of rice would go down from 75 *kyats* to 3 *kyats* per basket. But it's not true. In reality a basket of rice is now 80 *kyats*.

No, we have not heard that the railways would be used for tourism. But then, since we live in a small village in a remote place, it's very hard for us to get to hear the news. Only when we go close to the railroad do we get to hear some news. We used to hear that they were building the railways for a French oil company. But we don't hear about that any more. Now we are just told that the prices of commodities will go down because of the railway.

You ask me if I am angry? Oh, I'm very, very angry! Oh, we want this ruler to die! Why doesn't this cruel ruler die? Everybody wants it, not only me. Everybody is saying that.' ■

The couple were interviewed by **John Pilger**

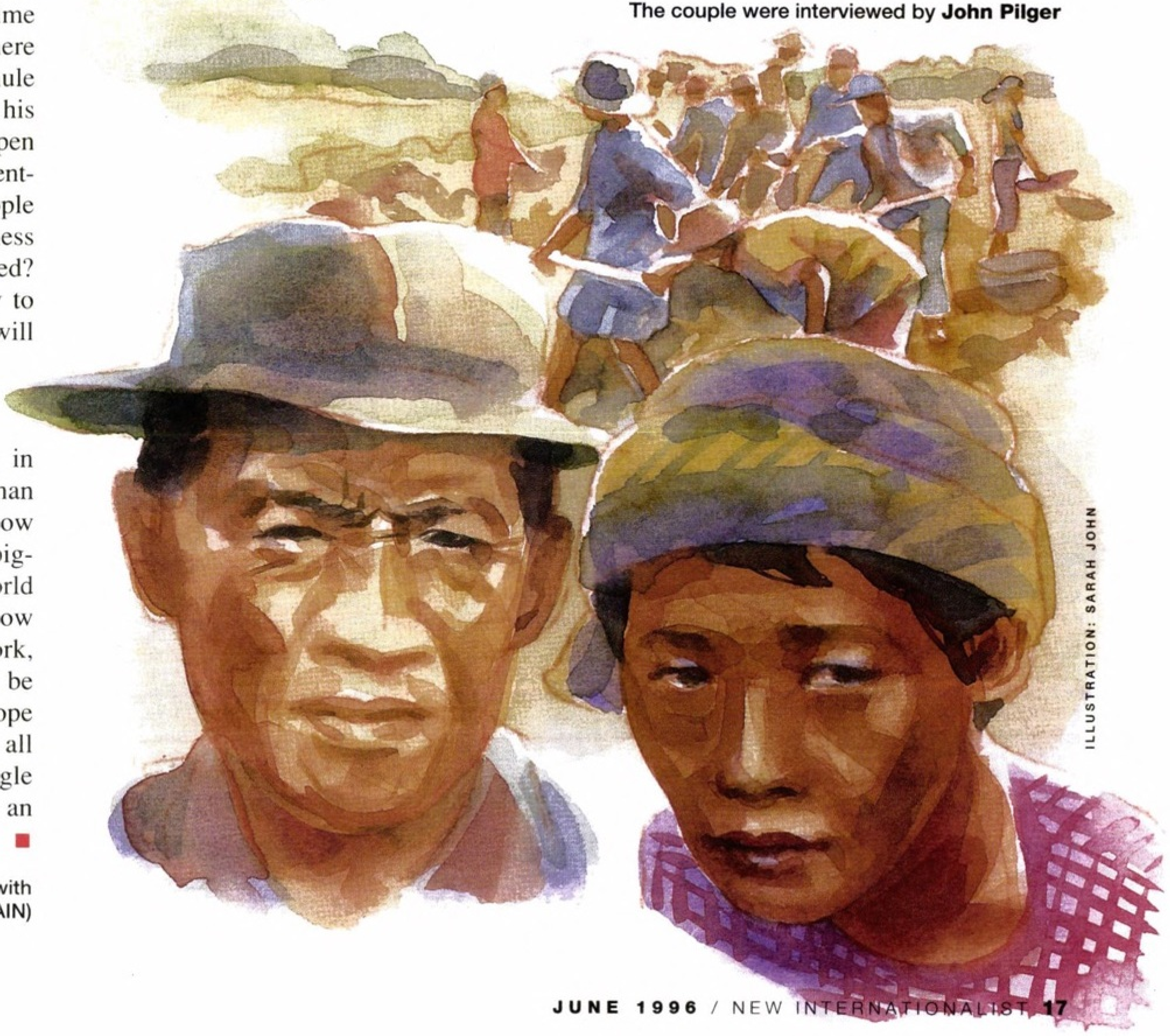


ILLUSTRATION: SARAH JOHN

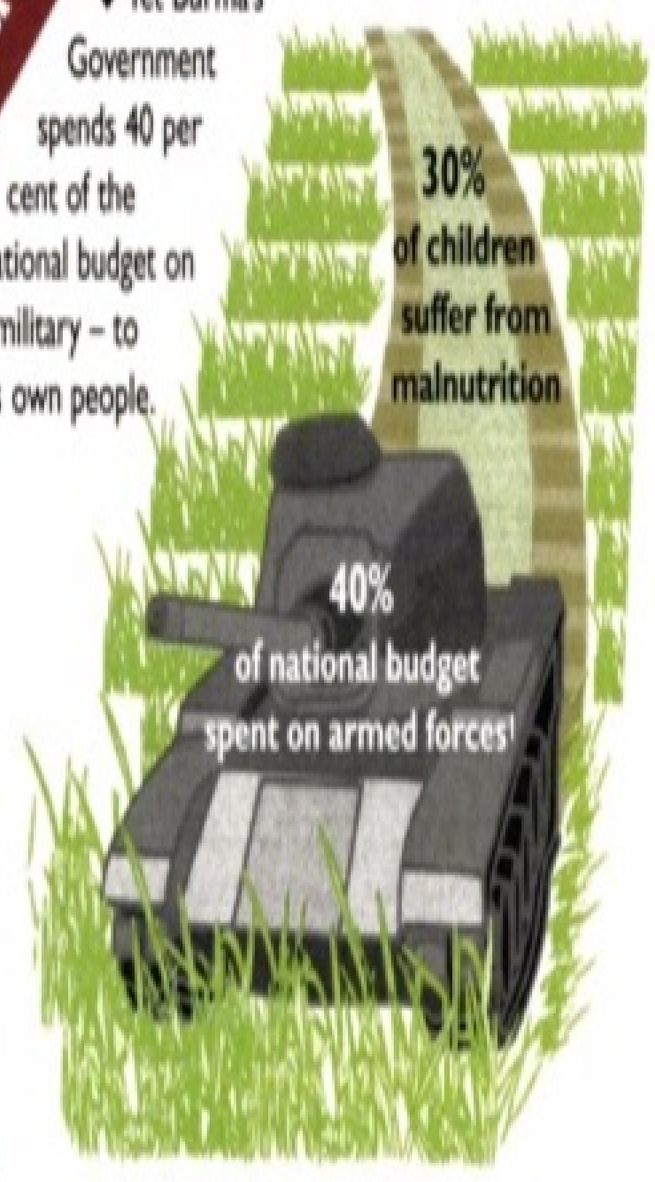
BURMA THE FACTS

Official statistics provided by the Burmese Government are notoriously unreliable. Here is an attempt to provide 'the facts'.

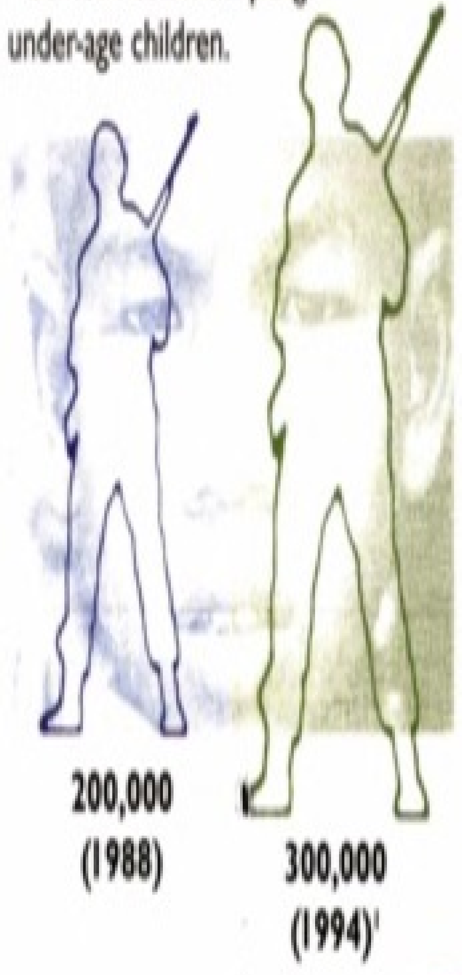
PRIORITIES

Burma is recognized by the UN as one of the least developed countries in the world.

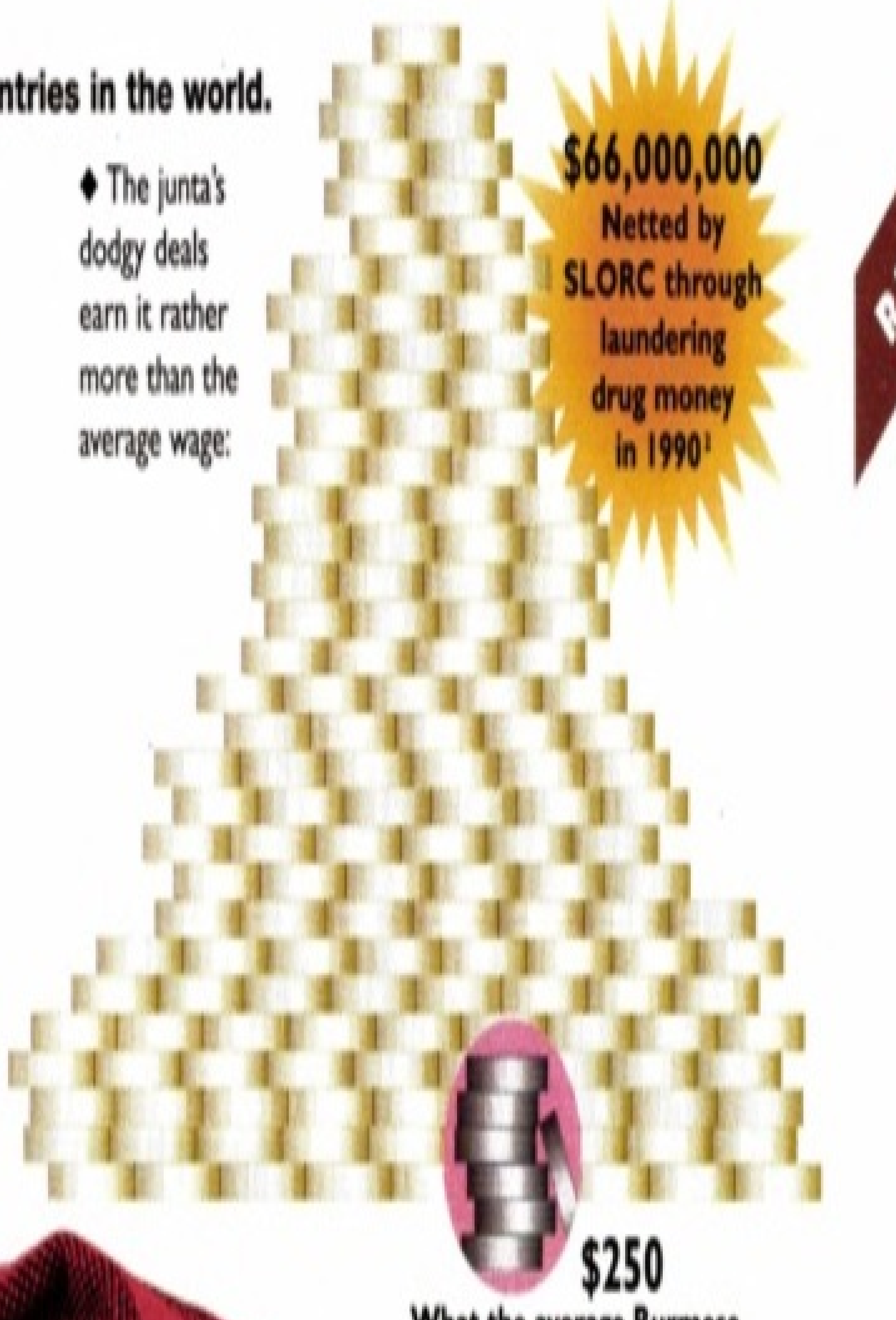
◆ Yet Burma's Government spends 40 per cent of the national budget on the military – to fight its own people.


30% of children suffer from malnutrition
40% of national budget spent on armed forces[1]

◆ The armed forces are swelling their ranks at a tremendous rate – sometimes conscripting under-age children.



◆ The junta's dodgy deals earn it rather more than the average wage:


$66,000,000 Netted by SLORC through laundering drug money in 1990[1]
$250

What the average Burmese citizen earns per year

REFUGEES

One in twenty Burmese are forced to leave their homes – either to flee abroad or to become internal refugees.

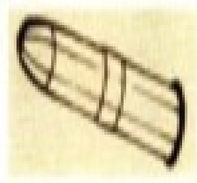
◆ In 1994 over 300,000 were officially recorded as living in camps in neighbouring Thailand, Bangladesh, China and India. But real figures are estimated to be more than three times that.[1]

◆ Around 1.5 million people have been displaced within Burma, forced by fighting or the Government to leave their villages and settle elsewhere.[1]

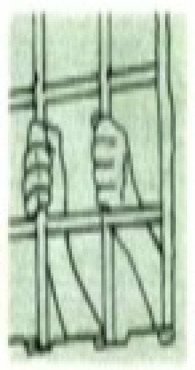
JEAN-LEO DUGAST / PANOS PICTURES

HUMAN RIGHTS

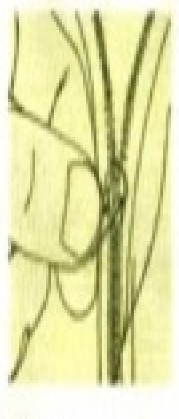
Burma has one of the worst human-rights records in the world.



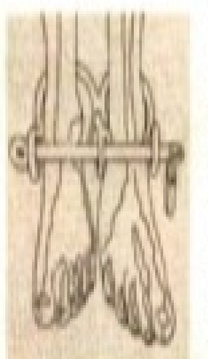
Killings: As many as 10,000 Burmese citizens were killed during the 1988 pro-democracy protests. Thousands more have died or gone missing since.[3]



Detention: There are at least 20 detention centres where torture is used. 2,246 political prisoners were released 1992-1995. But around 1,000 are still held.[3]



Rape: Repeated allegations of rape by Burmese forces have been made. Many rapes of Muslim women in Rakhine State were reported in 1991-92. Women forced to porter for the army are often raped as well.[3]

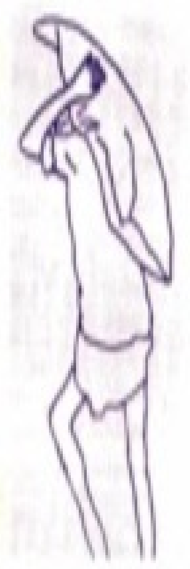


Forced labour: Millions of people have been forced to labour on dozens of projects since 1988.

◆ 200,000 have been forced to build a 110-mile extension to the Ye-Tavoy railway, designed to link pipelines for foreign oil companies. About 300 workers have died.

◆ 30,000 have laboured without pay – or medical treatment when cholera broke out – on Bassein Airport extension.

◆ 921,753 have been forced to labour on the Pakokku-Monywa section of the Chaung Oo-Pakokku Railroad.[2]



Forced portering: Tens of thousands of Burmese citizens as well as prisoners have been forced to porter for the Burmese army in war zones. Many die from hunger, exhaustion or injuries from mines.

Child labour: Less than a fifth of schoolchildren complete four grades of primary school. UNICEF reckons 4 million out of 11.8 million children aged 6-15 may be working today.[4]

Prostitution: 40,000 impoverished Burmese girls and women work as prostitutes in Thailand. Some – especially those from ethnic-minority areas – have been sold into prostitution for as little as $30-35.[1]

Political freedom: SLORC has refused to recognize the National League for Democracy government voted to power with 82% of seats in the People's Assembly in 1990. 16 elected MPs remain in detention. Censorship laws mean there is no freedom of speech.

BUSINESS

The SLORC stays in power with the help of foreign companies prepared to do business with it.

Dirty hands

Companies that continue to invest in Burma include:
Oil and gas: Texaco (US), Total (France), UNOCAL (US) and Premier (UK)
Other: Heineken (Holland)

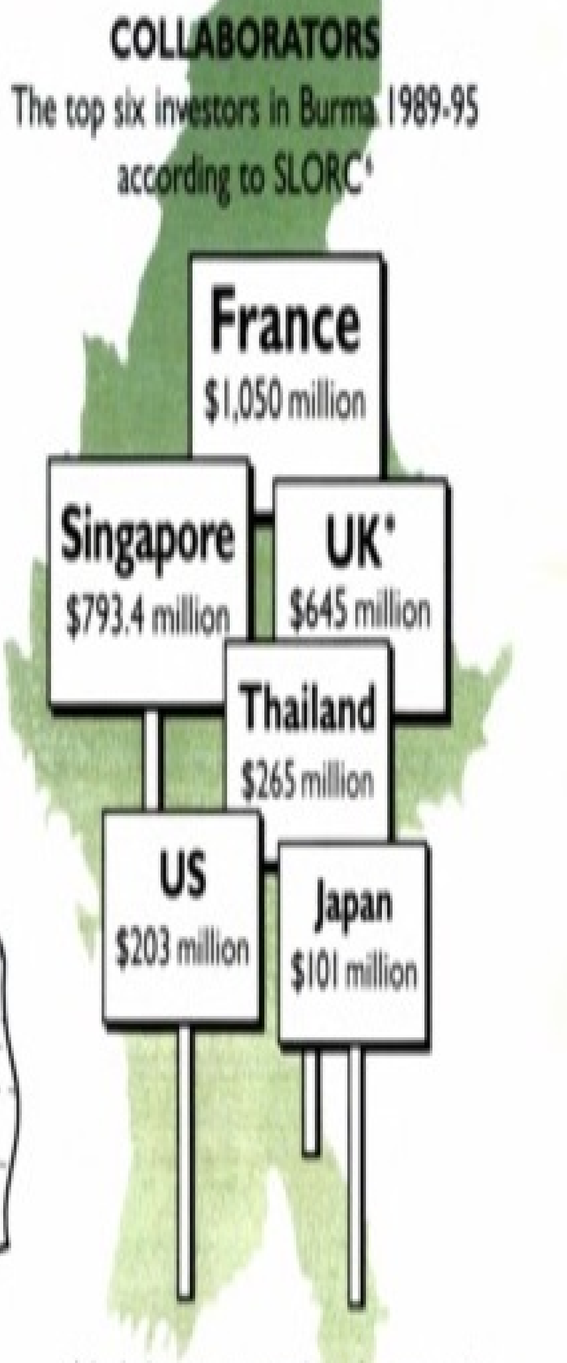
Cleaner hands

Companies that have pulled out of Burma are:
Oil and gas: Shell (UK), Amoco (US) and PetroCanada
Other: Liz Claiborne, Macy's, Eddie Bauer, PepsiCo (US)

Foreign oil companies have provided at least 65% of all foreign investment since 1988 and are therefore the main source of foreign revenue for the SLORC regime.[5]

COLLABORATORS

The top six investors in Burma 1989-95 according to SLORC[6]



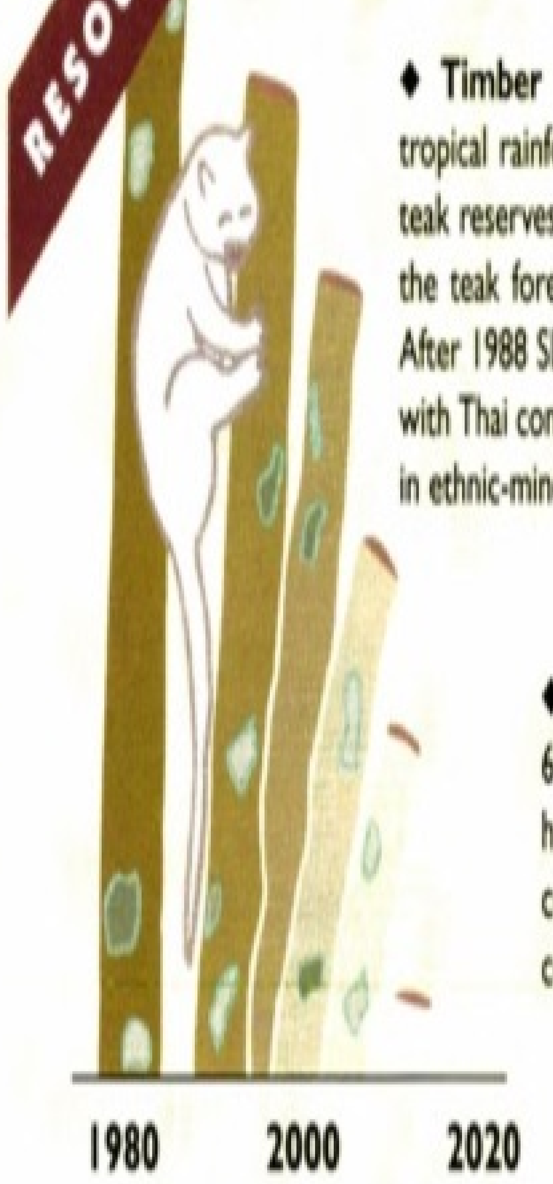
France	$1,050 million
Singapore	$793.4 million
UK*	$645 million
Thailand	$265 million
US	$203 million
Japan	$101 million

* Includes investment by other countries channeled through British tax havens

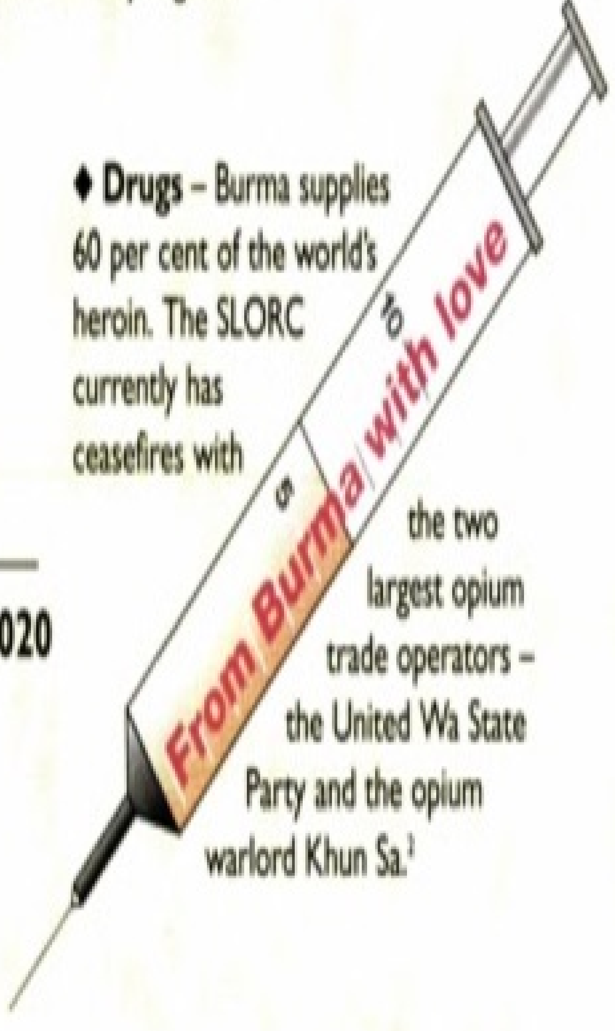
◆ China is Burma's closest ally and supplier of arms and loans. Since 1988 China has supplied at least $1.4 billion worth of arms.[3]

RESOURCES

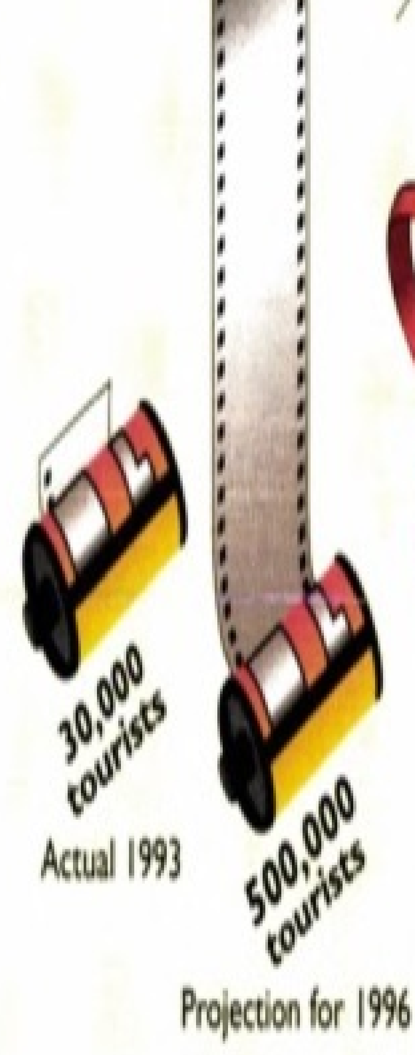
The regime is prepared to sell anything and everything.



◆ **Timber** – Burma's 34 million acres of tropical rainforests contain 80% of the world's teak reserves. But at the current rate of felling the teak forests will be gone within 25 years. After 1988 SLORC agreed 40 logging contracts with Thai companies worth $112 million, mainly in ethnic-minority regions.[2]



◆ **Drugs** – Burma supplies 60 per cent of the world's heroin. The SLORC currently has ceasefires with the two largest opium trade operators – the United Wa State Party and the opium warlord Khun Sa.[3]



Actual 1993

Projection for 1996

◆ Tourism – SLORC is looking to boost tourism during 1996 – the Year of the Tourist.

Over 15 companies from Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Hong Kong have signed contracts for hotel developments worth over $400 million.[7]

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1 *Ethnic Groups in Burma*, Martin Smith, Zed, London, 1994. 2 Burma Action Group, London, 1995/96. 3 *Burma: Entrenchment or Reform?*, Human Rights Watch/Asia, New York, 1995. 4 *Myanmar Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances*, J Boyden, UNICEF, 1992. 5 *Multinational Monitor*, Washington, October 1992. 6 Burmese Government figures, March 1995. 7 *Paradise Lost*, Article 19, London, 1994.

Icon of hope

DANIEL SIMON / FRANK SPOONER PICTURES

'I think the age has passed when the gun can solve problems – even the military authorities know that.'

Aung San Suu Kyi – *Burma's elected leader – was born in 1945, the daughter of Burma's national hero Aung San. She was two years old when he was assassinated, just before Burma gained the independence to which he had dedicated his life. After her education in Rangoon, Delhi and Oxford, she worked for the United Nations in New York and Bhutan. She married an Englishman and spent several years raising a family in England. Then in 1988 she returned to Burma to care for her dying mother. Her return coincided with the outbreak of a spontaneous revolt against 26 years of political repression and economic decline. Suu Kyi quickly emerged as the most effective and articulate leader of the movement and the party she founded, the National League for Democracy, went on to win a colossal electoral victory in 1990. But the military junta refused to transfer power as it had promised and until last year kept her under house-arrest in Rangoon.*

From her home she now organizes weekly political meetings – but she is as much at risk as any other citizen in SLORC's Burma and the regime still finds ways of restricting her movement and her contacts with the outside world. ***John Pilger*** *recently interviewed her in her Rangoon home.*

JP: Three years ago an official of the regime said: 'You can forget about Suu Kyi. She's finished.' Here you are, hardly finished. How do you explain that?

SK: I think it's because democracy is not finished in Burma. Until we finish this course for democracy, none of us who are involved in it will be finished.

Do you think the regime is as confident now as it was?

It's difficult to judge. The authoritarian regime always takes the attitude that 'we are totally in control and anybody who is in opposition to us has no place in the country and they are finished'. But what really impresses me is the courage of the people who have already been in prison and who continue to work for democracy. They know what it is like to be in a Burmese prison and they know that they are liable to be put back there any day. And yet they do not give up. That's very inspiring. I always feel that even if only five such people remain we will get democracy – and there are certainly many more than five!

What is the democracy that you and your people want?

Well, it's a very simple kind of democracy. We want a system that will guarantee our rights so that we can live in security; so that we do not have to wonder from day to day what will happen to us if we do something that will annoy those in power. If you asked an ordinary Burmese why they want democracy the answer will probably be: 'I want to have the basic right to try to make a decent living for myself without being frightened all the time.'

How can you reclaim the democracy that you won at the ballot box from the uncompromising and brutal power that confronts you?

We are not the first people to have had to face an uncompromising, brutal power in the quest for freedom and basic human rights. I think we have to depend chiefly on the will of our own people for democracy. In Buddhism we are taught the four basic ingredients for success: first you must have the will to want it; then you must have the right kind of attitude; then you must have perseverance; and then you must have wisdom. So we hope to combine these four. The will of the people for democracy is there and many of us have the right kind of spirit or attitude. A number of our people have shown tremendous perseverance; and I hope we'll acquire wisdom as we go along the way...

But it still comes down to the fact that on one side there is a power that has all the guns...

I think it is getting more difficult in this world to resolve things through military means. The fact that the authorities are so keen on attacking us in their newspapers indicates that they themselves are not depending on guns alone...

Well, they are clearly frightened of you...

(Laughs) I think the age has passed when the gun can solve problems and even the military authorities know that. Why are they using the pen if they think the gun can solve all problems?

Burma – with 40 per cent of its population consisting of ethnic minorities – seems like an Asian Yugoslavia. How will the country be united in the democracy that you plan?

We have been disunited in Burma because there's a tremendous lack of trust between the Burmans and the other ethnic groups and among the ethnic groups themselves. In order to build up trust there has to be openness – and that is why democracy is necessary. Yugoslavia is a very good example of a country where there was not sufficient openness to resolve the problems between the Serbs and the Croats. They were not provided with a framework within which they could discuss their differences and so they ended up shooting each other. In Burma we badly need the kind of framework that will allow us to talk about our grievances without killing each other. I do not think there will ever be true unity without democracy – as Yugoslavia has proved. For more than 40 years nobody knew what was going on there under the surface. Because there was a strong government keeping everyone in order we thought there was unity. But unity comes from within and unless we create a framework for all of us to talk very openly and to generate trust we will never get unity. It's not a question of 'how will democracy ever achieve unity?', but 'how will we ever achieve unity *without* democracy?'

Is it not fair to describe your release from house-arrest as an entirely cynical decision by the regime to give itself a human face in order to encourage foreign investment?

I think perhaps they also miscalculated the situation. They may have calculated that the National League for Democracy was a spent force and that releasing me was not going to make any difference...

Should foreign investors come?

I do not think they should come yet – and I am speaking for them as well as for the people of Burma. From the point of view of the people of Burma, there is hardly any investment coming in now that will provide employment and better standards of living for those who really need help. From the point of view of the investors, the basic structures necessary for sustained economic growth do not yet exist in Burma. Investing now may go against economic growth because it may make the authorities think that the half-measures they have taken are sufficient... but they are not and this will lead to social and economic problems which will work against the interests of the investors themselves.

What do you say to foreign politicians who say that Burma is heading towards democracy and therefore investment is justifiable?

Investment is not justifiable now. But I am convinced that Burma is heading towards democracy because it's what the people want – and in spite of investment, not because of it.

A lot of Western politicians say that through commercial contacts with democratic nations the Burmese people will gain experience of democratic principles.

Not in the least. The so-called 'open-market economy' is only open to some. Commercial contacts are certainly not going to help Burmese people get democratic ideas. New investments help a small élite get richer. I would have thought that this would work against the very idea of democracy because the gap between rich and poor is growing all the time.

Should tourists stay away?

Burma will always be here and when it is democratic it will be a place that I think tourists will enjoy visiting. They will [then] need have no qualms or guilt feelings.

You've become quite an extraordinary icon of hope. Is that a burden?

Yes and no. Yes, because if people base their hopes on you, then of course it's a responsibility. No, because I've always said that I can't do it alone and neither can the National League for Democracy. We need the help of the people and we need the rest of the world. I have always said I would do my best. I have never promised that will get the people democracy.

No, but it's what people expect of you. The people I've spoken to clearly regard you as something of a saint – almost a miracle worker.

I am not a saint and I think you'd better tell the world... I would not like to be thought of as a saint...

What are your sinful qualities then?

I've got a short temper. I'd rather sit down and read than really be engaged in public meetings and things like that...

Your husband Michael Aris has written movingly of his early commitment to you. Could you tell me something about that?

It's not all that complicated. I just said, 'I am Burmese and there may come a time when I have to go back to Burma and when that time comes I would expect you to be understanding and sympathetic', and he said, 'yes'. It was very simple – not a big negotiation process at all...

But you couldn't – either of you – have foreseen the events that were coming to you, or could you?

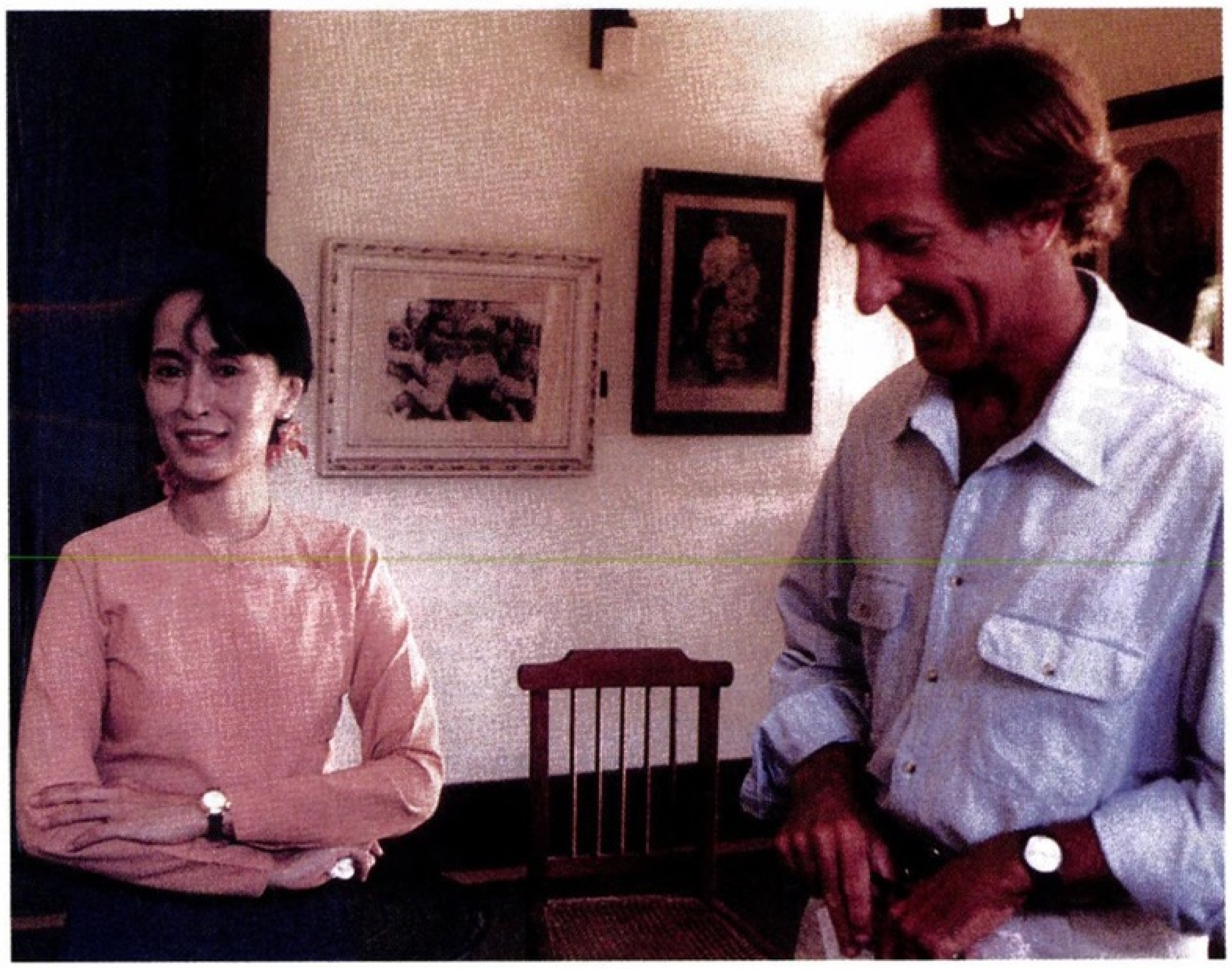
No. But I always had every intention of coming back to do what I could for Burma because that's where my roots are. When I got the phone call about my mother's illness it was a matter of coming home and making all the practical arrangements necessary. I had no time to think of it as a 'day of reckoning'. I knew my mother's life was probably coming to a close, but I did not know how long I would be in Burma...

Could you tell me about the first day you were placed under house-arrest?

There were a lot of people here. We were all in good humour... There wasn't a scurry to burn incriminating material because we didn't have any incriminating material. My two sons were here and I remember them playing Monopoly with some of the students. The older people sat around and talked and while the phone was still usable made calls to their families... It was not unexpected and we just thought, 'well, yes, this is it...' I thought I would be taken to NC [the maximum security prison] and was rather disappointed when I was left here and the others were taken away...

Shortly after her release from house-arrest, an emotional meeting with students.

RENAUT THOMAS / FRANK SPOONER PICTURES



With John Pilger in the house where she spent her six years detention.

During all those years when you were under house-arrest did you ever waver in your resolve not to accept exile?
No, of course I didn't. I had promised the people I would do everything I could do to get democracy... So there was no question of going into exile...

What was the most difficult time for you personally during your house arrest?
There isn't any particular time that stands out... I was worried for my colleagues, about our people out there when there was a lot of repression ...

And of course, I missed my family and I worried about my sons very much... My youngest was only 12 and had to be put in boarding school. But I would remind myself that the families of my colleagues were much worse off, some were in prison, whereas I knew my family was safe...

Were you able to keep in touch with Michael during that time?
There were times when we were out of touch. The longest period was two years and four or five months.

No letters or anything during that time?
No.

No letters from the children?
No.

Were you concerned about the impact this would have on your two boys?
Yes, of course. It's very difficult for children to cope with a situation like that. My youngest son is a very home-loving child. He's not the sort who enjoys boarding-school life at all, but these things had to be done...

There were times when you did not have enough to eat. Is that correct?
Yes, but I don't think of that as tremendous suffering. I generally don't eat much anyway. One does get weak and it's inconvenient. I did worry about my heart because I had difficulty breathing. I couldn't lie flat because I found it difficult to breathe after I became very weak. But I think that's quite normal.

Well, it's normal if you're not eating... You were cut off from family, friends and colleagues; surrounded by a hostile force. Weren't there times when you were actually terrified?
No, I didn't feel hostile towards the guards or soldiers surrounding me and I think fear comes from hostility. So I felt quite relaxed...

You hadn't been able to speak to your husband or sons for two whole years. That must have produced an aloneness that in itself is frightening, surely?
Yes, well I didn't feel really alone because I had the radio, you know. I listened to the radio five or six hours a day and that kept me in touch with the rest of the world and of course I had my books. And I think loneliness comes from inside. People who are free and live in big cities often suffer from terrible loneliness...

You've written about fear and fearlessness. Was there a point during your house-arrest when you actually had to conquer fear?
No, not during my house-arrest, but when I was small. It was in this house that I conquered my fear of the dark.

How did you conquer your fear of the dark?
By wandering about in the dark, at night, for about two weeks running. In the end I got a bit bored with the whole idea.

During those days of house-arrest what were the ordinary pleasures you looked forward to?
I had a busy timetable, although this might seem strange. From 4.30 am when I got up to meditate right through until I went to bed at 9 pm. There was always something to do with every hour. I liked listening to music on the radio. I would look forward to continuing with the books I was reading and, of course, meditation was very calming and strengthening. I have never been a very athletic type and so I didn't enjoy doing my exercises so much. But I did them regularly after meditating.

Burmese society is very male-dominated. How would you change it if you were leading a democratic government here?
People keep asking me about women's rights and I always find it a little difficult to answer because the men in Burma have no rights either. I feel that first of all we have to get basic rights for everybody and then we have to attack this area. Women are particularly discriminated against. It is clear that women do not get what they deserve. There are very few women in the Civil Service, for example. You see very few women in high positions. And yet if you look at medical school, where the brightest students go, about 50 to 60 per cent of students are girls. So girls are not lacking in ability or education, but they don't get as far as they ought to. Obviously these areas will have to be studied.

Is Burma going to be free in your lifetime?
I can't tell what my lifetime is going to be, so I can't answer that question.

All right, then. Will Burma be free within the foreseeable future? Let's say within the next ten years?
I think so, yes.

What can people around the world do to help?
First, think about the situation in Burma. Then I would ask them to study the UN General Assembly Resolution on Burma and to help implement it. It's a good resolution: it calls for the early and full restoration of democracy, for the acknowledgement of the will of the people in the 1990 elections and for the full participation of the people in the political life of Burma. And, of course, it calls for the release of political prisoners and observation of basic human rights. ■

(See Action page 30)

Out of control

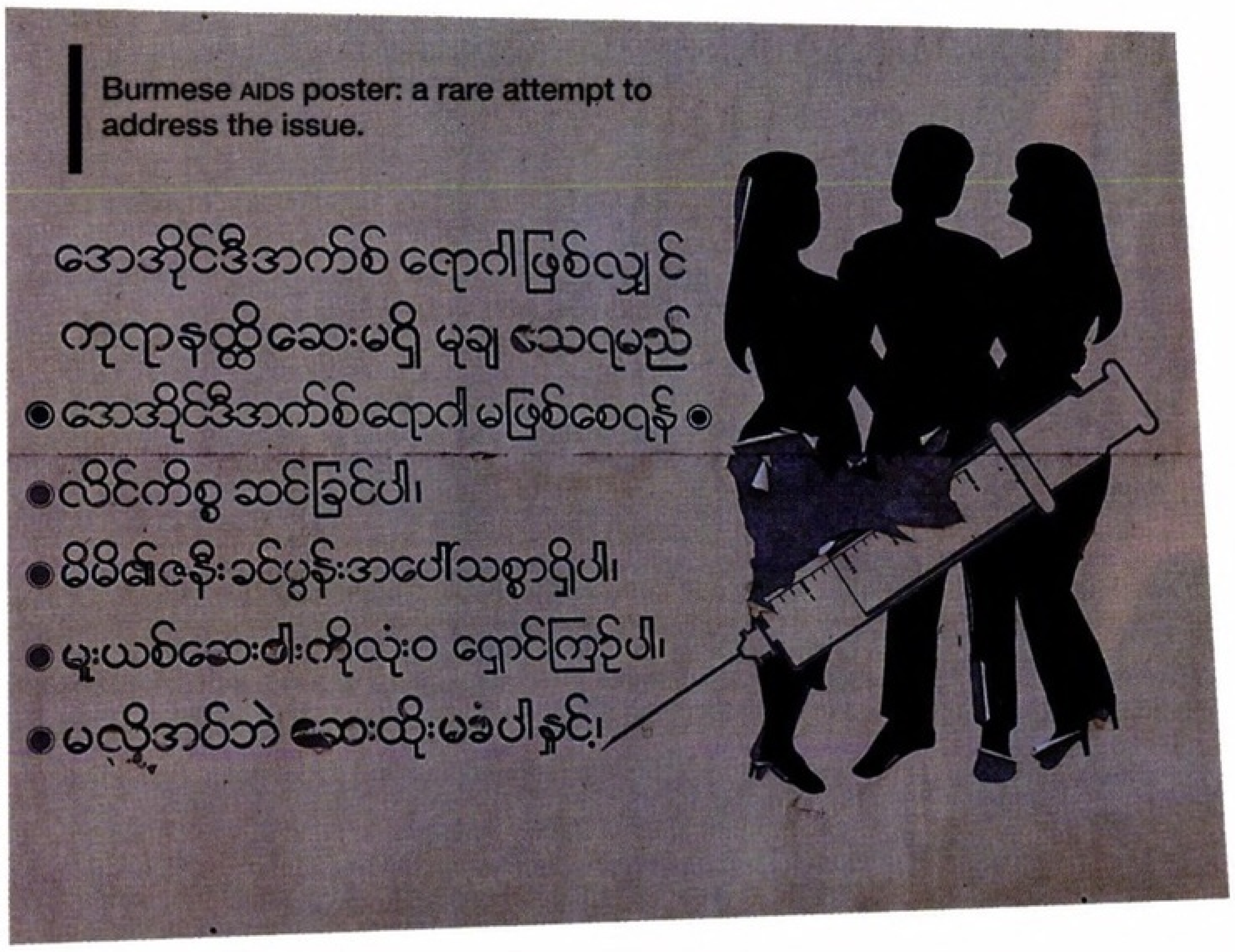
Burma has one the fastest rates of HIV infection in the world – which suits the SLORC very well.

Chris Beyrer and **Faith Doherty** report on how AIDS and addiction are 'pacifying' rebellious youth.

THE HIV virus came late to densely populated Asia – only at the end of the 1980s. But since then its effect has been explosive. Hardest hit have been India, Thailand, Burma and Cambodia. Isolated under an authoritarian regime, Burma is the least known or understood of these countries. But from what is known it's clear that HIV has already spread extensively and that the situation is deteriorating very rapidly. Crude and conservative estimates for 1995 put Burma's number of people infected by HIV at between 350,000 and 450,000 – roughly one per cent of the entire population. Education, prevention and care programs are woefully inadequate. Medical supplies are short and their distribution uneven. Blood transfusion is especially unsafe in rural areas. Condoms were illegal in Burma until 1992 and are still scarce and expensive. To make matters worse, Burma is in the throes of another epidemic – of intravenous drug injection. When the military government of General Ne Win initiated the first HIV-screening programs in 1985 no cases were detected. Then in 1988 drug-users with HIV were found in Rangoon – the first group to be found with the virus.

Although traditionally most of the raw heroin produced in the country is exported, a domestic market for heroin has emerged in recent years and become quite widespread. Rangoon, Mandalay and other major towns and cities now have large numbers of intravenous drug-users. In 1994 the Burmese authorities estimated that one per cent of adult men nationwide were injecting drugs. In the same year a UN report estimated that 60 to 70 per cent of all intravenous drug-users in Burma were HIV-positive. The rapidity of the spread is partly accounted for by the fact that it is illegal to possess syringes except for medical purposes and so needle-sharing is the norm among drug-users. Professional injectors work in 'tea stall' shooting galleries, re-using needles and transmitting HIV on a daily basis.

Human-rights investigators who recently visited a 'shooting gallery' found what they described as a human tragedy in the making. Addicts came to the stall for their daily fixes and relied on injectors to find veins in their ruined limbs. The witnesses saw one needle used on five addicts without sterilization between uses. When asked why he wasn't using bleach or boiling to sterilize the needles, the injector replied that he didn't have time to boil and bleach was 'too complicated'.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Burmese AIDS poster: a rare attempt to address the issue.

PIERS CAVENDISH / IMPACT

Health professionals point to 1988 as the year in which heroin use became widespread among Burma's youth. Before then there had been a scattering of addicts and traditional use of smoked opium was common among some ethnic groups. The heroin epidemic coincides with the suppression of the mass movement of 1988 when millions of Burma's people rose up against years of military misrule and demanded democracy. The rise in domestic heroin use has closely mirrored the SLORC junta's consolidation of power.

> ***Professional injectors work in 'tea stall' shooting galleries, re-using needles and transmitting HIV on a daily basis.***

Like the heroin epidemic, the sexual spread of HIV in Burma emerges from a tangle of social and political problems. Men who visit prostitutes can be charged under British penal codes which carry sentences of up to ten years in prison; the severity of these penalties has driven commercial sex deep underground. Meanwhile the long struggle of Burma's ethnic groups against the junta has fostered prostitution and trafficking of women in some areas. One of the effects of war and social dislocation in Shan State has been a major traffic in Shan women and girls for the Thai sex industry. More than a quarter of all women entering the sex industry in northern Thailand are Shan migrants. Thai brothel recruiters are active in the ethnic Akha, Lahu and Lisu tribal areas of the Thai-Burma border as well as in the southern Tenasserim region – areas marked by extreme poverty, social chaos and forced-labour campaigns by the junta.

The number of people moving around the country in search of work has also contributed to the spread of HIV. In recent years mining camps have sprung up in the Shan and Kachin States. These makeshift communities are seasonal: they have only a few thousand workers in the rainy season but contain up to 150,000 in the drier months. Most of the miners are young men in search of work. They are away from home for many months, working on dangerous job sites; drug use and prostitution are common.

One AIDS clinic reported that the majority of its HIV-positive patients were heroin-users and that most of them started to use the drug while working in the mines. Because such workers typically come from all over the country the potential for HIV-spread after their return home is great. Indeed, without these extensive population movements it would be difficult to explain the rapid and pervasive spread of HIV across a country so large and difficult to traverse.

So what can be done to halt this spread? Without democracy and with the SLORC in control of education, healthcare and the media, it's hard to put into practice the usual measures. Some aid agencies have decided to 'bite the bullet' and work with the SLORC. But so far to little avail. One international agency, with a mandate to assist with HIV prevention, spent more than ten months in 1994 and 1995 waiting for a Memorandum of Understanding from the regime. It was never signed and the aid agency eventually pulled its staff out of Burma. The democratically elected Government of Burma – Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy – is currently exploring ways of tackling a range of issues crucial to the well-being of the people of Burma, including HIV. Working with these leaders should be a priority for any organization seeking to help. But it is unclear whether or not the junta will tolerate such collaborations.

One proposal – recently made at the Third International Conference on AIDS in Asia – is to 'depoliticize AIDS in Burma'. The idea is that all parties – the opposition and ethnic nationalities included – should join hands in an effort to control what is already a national tragedy.

But the HIV epidemic is *inherently* political and it may be naive and counterproductive to imagine that its 'de-politicization' is possible. Until there is real political movement towards democracy, basic freedoms and respect for human rights, it is difficult to imagine how the HIV epidemic in Burma can be contained. The junta shows no signs of progress on these fronts. But the HIV epidemic will not wait. ■

Chris Beyrer and **Faith Doherty** are based in Bangkok where they work with the South-East Asian Information Network (SAIN).

An exile's story

' My parents always taught us to do the right thing and when we took part in the [August 1988] demonstration they supported us. My father took part too – even though he was a prison officer. He was on duty on the day of the demonstration, but he took off his uniform and marched together with political prisoners. He was later dismissed from his job...

[After the pro-democracy demonstrations were crushed] I told my parents that I would have to leave because you could not walk or work freely inside Burma. It was really painful because I love my parents very much and there is nothing that can replace them. When I told my father I would have to leave he looked so sad. My parents adored us and they knew we were doing the right thing. But it was very sad for them. We were going away from them... but they said we should not give up. I did not realize then that it would be the last time I saw my father alive. After my father was dismissed from his job, the family was forced to move to Mon State and my father died there. I only heard of his death several months later from a friend who brought a message from Burma.

'I told my parents to disown me'

Meanwhile, my two older brothers, who are active in the struggle for democracy, had been arrested and imprisoned in July 1989. I heard from a friend that they were badly tortured. One of my brothers was released in 1992 and the other in 1993. But the older one was re-arrested while taking part in a Burma Human-Rights March. He was given a seven-year sentence for singing a freedom song. Fifty students were arrested for singing the song and nine were badly tortured, including my brother.

My younger brother didn't take part in the 1988 demonstrations but he was not allowed to attend school for two years all the same.

Just before I left Burma I told my parents to announce that they disowned me. Because you know, if I did something militarily then they would give my family a very hard time. So they had to announce in a newspaper that they disowned me, so that whatever I did would be nothing to do with them.

It was very painful for all of us – for my parents and for me. But it was the best way for all of us. Since I have left Burma I have not met with my family or spoken with any of them. They don't even know if I'm still alive or not...' ■

Interviewed by **John Pilger in Oslo**

ILLUSTRATION: SARAH JOHN

Will Burma rise again?

Students led the 1988 uprising. What is the state of the protest movement now? Burmese journalist **Zaw Gyi** tries to gauge the climate.

'Everyone hates the junta.' Inflation, poverty and frustration are rising at street-level.

Two Rangoon comedians were recently handed out long jail-sentences – for the crime of making fun of the military regime. A senior UN official, Georgio Giacamelli, was vilified in the state-run newspapers – because during his recent visit to Rangoon he had the audacity to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi. Meanwhile, in Rangoon tea shops, inflation has been the main topic of conversation, residents complaining that they can no longer afford to buy anything more than *htamajei* – the water rice is boiled in. Sold in bottles, the brew used to be drunk after dinner – now it's being consumed instead of dinner.

With the military regime controlling both the economy and government, it is not hard to point the finger of blame for poverty, repression and corruption in Burma today. Indeed, the country's largest firm – The Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings – was set up by the army in 1990 and is managed by retired and active military personnel.

But how much longer can all this continue? Will such hardship and corruption, combined with political repression, lead to an uprising, like that of 8 August 1988?

The role of students in Burma should not be underestimated. In 1988 the student-led movement toppled a regime, before Ne Win moved to put the SLORC junta into power. In Burma, as in many Asian countries, students consider themselves to be key players in political change. It will be difficult for the junta to erase that tradition. Sources in Rangoon believe the military authorities still fear possible unrest: 'They are very anxious about controlling the students,' remarked one.

Student leader Min Ze Ya and his group released a statement in January of this year calling for the junta to release all student detainees. The statement said: 'The SLORC has freed political prisoners [since 1992] but very few students have been released. They should be freed and allowed to return to classrooms.'

As a result he was banished by military intelligence to his home town in Mon State. The warning from the junta was: 'If you don't go back you will be arrested.' Many student activists are in similar situations and under strict surveillance.

Recent reports indicate that students and activists in Rangoon are secretly distributing leaflets, newsletters and documents against the junta. 'Everyone hates SLORC – even people who are making money,' said one source who has been closely following Rangoon politics. 'We can see there is so much anger and frustration. But the opposition is working for the long term. It is not enough just to go out and say: "We hate SLORC".'

The feeling today is that going out on the streets to be shot at is not the strategy to pursue. 'Thousands were murdered in 1988, but what did we get?' say Rangoon and Mandalay residents. 'Suu Kyi is doing the right thing. She knows what she is doing. She is the only one who dares to challenge authority and speak out.' According to a member of the National League for Democracy, Suu Kyi's party: 'She is trying to build up something and waiting for the right moment.'

However, ethnic armies along the border with Thailand are less optimistic about what non-violent resistance can achieve. 'SLORC only talks to those with weapons,' said a Karenni rebel. The urban opposition suffered heavily under the regime. At least opponents with guns could fight back when attacked by SLORC. If armed, he believed, the opposition would win.

Student activist Tay Za, who came to Thailand after spending a total of thirteen months in three prisons, is more hopeful: 'We want to show that the movement is not dead. It is happening.'

Nothing is ever predictable in Burma. But as long as the junta ignores its political opposition and resists meaningful discussion while continuing its brutal tactics of arrest and intimidation, it will face major unrest at home as well as increasingly strong anti-SLORC campaigns abroad.

If there is a public uprising in the foreseeable future it won't come as a surprise to the junta. 'They are ready to put them down,' said a SLORC-watcher ominously. ■

Zaw Gyi (an alias) is a Burmese journalist, forced to flee the country in 1988. He lives and works in exile in Thailand.

A kaleidoscope of peoples

Burma has probably the most complex ethnic mix in the world. Twenty-one major ethnic groups and over 100 languages have been identified in a population of around 45 million.

Over the centuries different ethnic groups have clashed – but most of the time they have managed to live alongside each other. British colonizers, however, were able to exploit ethnic tensions in order to pursue their policy of 'divide and rule'.

In the struggle for independence that followed, the strength of ethnic-minority nationalist feeling was underestimated by the Burmese freedom fighters led by Aung San. After the 1962 military coup brought General Ne Win to power, ethnic-minority groups were even more marginalized. They claimed they were treated as second-class citizens in relation to the racial majority (who are called 'Burman') in every field.

Since then, ethnic-minority groups and their armies have been at the forefront of the armed struggle against the dictatorship. They have also been at the receiving end of some of the most serious human-rights abuses. Recently government forces have gained the upper hand on the battlefield and also negotiated ceasefires with a number of groups.

If and when democracy is restored in Burma, preventing inter-ethnic strife will need to be at the top of the agenda – or very close to it. Otherwise Burma could become another Yugoslavia – and this is a justification the country's military uses to hold on to power.

The ethnic groups of today can be broadly classified into four: the Tibeto-Burman, the Tai, the Karen, and the Mon. The Muslim Rohingya originate from the Middle East and are a distinct group.

Karen

ETHNIC NATIONALITIES: *Karen, Karenni, Pao, Padaung and Kayaw.* **POPULATION:** *between 4 and 5 million*

JEAN-LÉO DUGAST / PANOS PICTURES

The Karen are known as a rugged and stoic people who have a great appreciation of nature and a reverential attitude towards the environment. They live mainly in farming villages built of thatch and bamboo. There are several sub-groups of Karens including: the Pwo (lowland and delta), the Sgaw and the Bwe (mainly in the hills). The Karen are also connected ethnically with the Karenni, the Pao and the Kayan. Christianity is the dominant religion among the political leaders. It is said that the Karens were predisposed to the Christianity because of the uncanny parallels between Bible stories and traditional Karen animist legends. The Karen are probably the largest Christian group in Burma, although spirit worship still exists and most Karens are in fact Buddhists.

The Karen National Union – with its 8,000-strong guerrilla army – has been a most determined opponent to the military dictatorship. However, recent splits between the Christian leadership and some Buddhist units made the movement vulnerable and SLORC forces successfully stormed Karen resistance headquarters at Manerplaw in 1995.

Over 70,000 Karens are currently in refugee camps in Thailand.

Tai

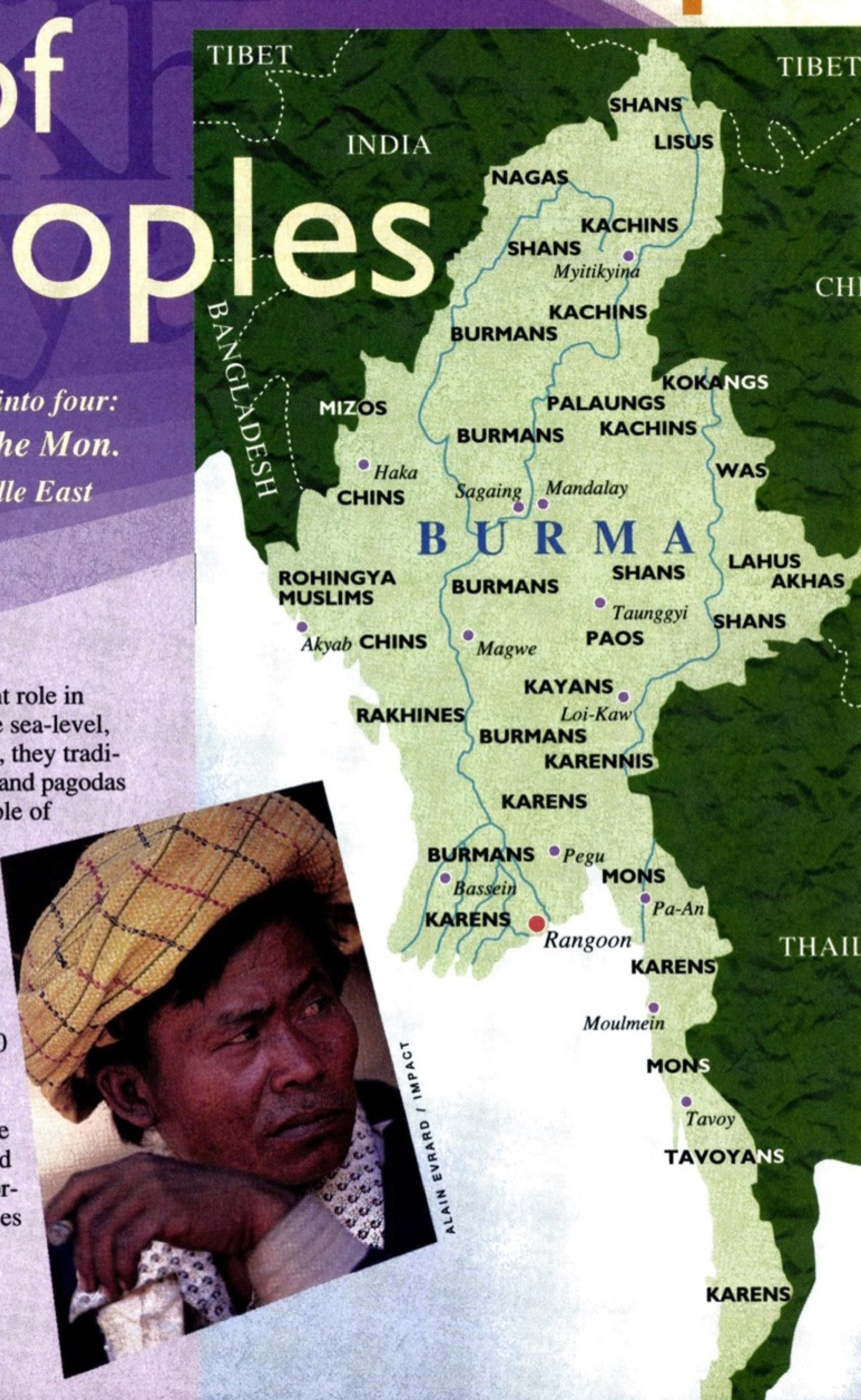
ETHNIC NATIONALITY: *Shan*
POPULATION: *between 3.5 and 4 million*

The Shan are predominantly Buddhist and have played an important role in shaping the mystique of Burma. Living several thousand feet above sea-level, amid the pine forests, waterfalls and freshwater lakes of Shan State, they traditionally favour a life of simplicity and spirituality. Buddhist temples and pagodas dot the crests of their rugged hills. A local subgroup, the Intha people of Inle Lake, are famous for their leg-rowing technique.

For the past three decades Shan State has played host to a greater variety of ethnic militia and insurgent armies than perhaps any other place on earth. In recent years the strongest resistance to Government forces has come from the 15,000-strong Mong Tai Army led by 'opium warlord' Kung Sa, who signed a ceasefire with the Government in January 1996.

Today there is a humanitarian crisis in Shan State. Over 500,000 people are estimated to have been forced to leave their homes and refugee communities huddle around every town in the state. Well over 1,000 villages have been forcibly relocated or destroyed by the Army since 1988 and human-rights abuses are widespread. War and poverty have also forced thousands of women and girls over the border to Thailand to find work as prostitutes. HIV rates among returnees are reported to be as high as 90 per cent.

ALAIN EVRARD / IMPACT



Tibeto-Burman

ETHNIC NATIONALITIES: *Burman, Rakhine, Kachin, Chin, Akha, Lisu and Naga.* **POPULATION:** *29 million*

ALAIN EVRARD / IMPACT

The Burmans – with a population of around 26 million – are the majority ethnic group in Burma. They are Buddhist and have dominated all areas of Burmese life, especially in the past 150 years. Until recently, armed Burman opponents of the military regime have tended to belong to the Democratic Alliance of Burma or the Communist Party of Burma.

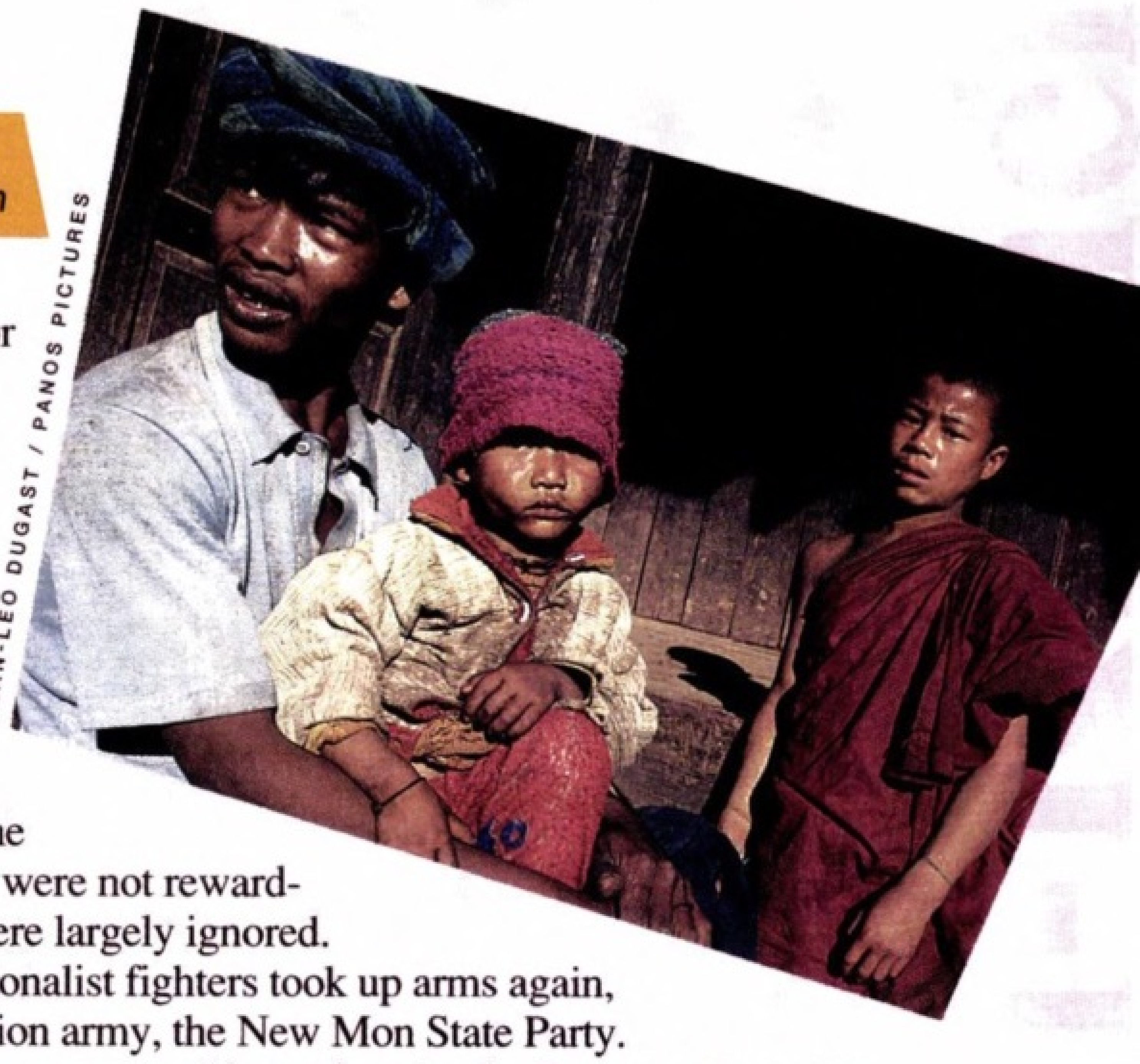
Of the several hill peoples inhabiting north-east Burma, it is the minority Kachin – two-thirds of whom are Christian – who have most determinedly pursued the dream of creating a federal or independent nation-state.

Their main armed resistance group, the Kachin Independence Organization, was reckoned to be the best-organized insurgent group – so the Government embarked on a long-term policy to neutralize it once and for all. As many as 100,000 Kachin villagers were forced from their homes in counter-insurgency operations between 1988 and 1992 and hundreds of Kachin villages were destroyed. In many Government-controlled Kachin areas people have been forced to work as labourers or front-line porters. A formal ceasefire was signed in February 1994 but grave human-rights abuses continue.

The Chin, who inhabit a vast mountain chain running up western Burma into north-east India, are highly regarded as skilled fisherfolk, hunters and weavers of fine fabrics and blankets. But the poor quality of their land has made them dependent for food and supplies on their lowland neighbours and this helps explain the long-standing political and economic under-development of the region. After the 1962 coup, insurgent groups were either subsumed by communist groups or they took to the Thai or Indian borders. Since 1988 Chin politics have undergone transformation: in the 1990 election seven nationalist Chin and five National League for Democracy candidates were elected and nationalist sentiment continues to grow. The main armed opposition group is the Chin National Front.

Mon-Khmer

ETHNIC NATIONALITIES: *Mon, Wa, and Paulung.* **POPULATION:** *4 million*


JEAN-LÉO DUGAST / PANOS PICTURES

It was the Mon who introduced both Buddhism and writing to Burma – and for centuries they have taken pride in their literacy and high regard for culture and aesthetics. Today many Mon have been assimilated into the mainstream of Burmese Buddhist culture. Mon intellectuals and Buddhist monks have, however, played an important role in the survival and teaching of the Mon language. In Shan State live a smaller Mon-Khmer group, the Palaung, who are hill-dwellers practising both Buddhism and spirit worship. Another group, the Wa, have since the 1960s earned the dubious reputation of becoming one of the main suppliers of opium from the notorious Golden Triangle, source of 60 per cent of today's heroin.

Although the Mon generally worked with the mainstream independence movement they were not rewarded for it and their political demands were largely ignored.

Following the 1962 coup Mon nationalist fighters took up arms again, joining the present-day opposition army, the New Mon State Party.

Since 1988 there have been repeated incursions by the Burmese Army into Mon villages, and mounting reports of enforced labour, relocations, rape, murder and other serious human-rights abuses. As many as 100,000 Mon refugees and economic migrants went into exile in Thailand. In recent years Mon communities have also come under intense pressure from government forces operating in conjunction with Thai logging and other commercial interests.

In June 1995 the New Mon State Army signed a military ceasefire with the Government.

Rohingya

ETHNIC NATIONALITY: *Rohingya*
POPULATION: *1.4 million*

The state of Arakan along Burma's coast is partly inhabited by the Rohingya, a distinct cultural group of Muslims descended from Arab, Moorish, Mughal and Bengali merchants who arrived after the seventh century. Rohingya predominate in the far north of Arakan State, mainly inhabited by the Buddhist Rakhine who are of Tibeto-Burman stock. There have been centuries of tension between the two groups. The Rohingya were ignored by the Burmans during the independence struggle and sided with the British.

In 1977-78, Rangoon's armies forced 200,000 Rohingyan refugees into Bangladesh. Renewed atrocities by Ne Win's regime sent an additional 260,000 fleeing across the border in 1992, bearing accounts of gross human-rights abuses. By late 1995 over 190,000 had been allowed to return but in many cases not to their home villages.

Under the British, Arakan was one of the richest areas of Burma – now it is one of the poorest. After three decades of military rule, many therefore see Arakan as a tragic example of all that is wrong with Burma: ethnic discrimination, a stagnant economy, widespread corruption, rampant inflation and fighting in the mountains. The main insurgent groups are the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front, the Rohingya Solidarity Organization and the National Unity party of Arakan.

LIBA TAYLOR / PANOS PICTURES

All population figures are estimates. There has been no reliable census of ethnic nationality populations since 1931.

Sources: Martin Smith, *Ethnic Groups in Burma*, Anti-Slavery International, 1994, and *Burma Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, Zed Books, 1991; **Alan Clements** and **Leslie Kean**, *Burma's Revolution of the Spirit*, White Orchid, 1995.

Come to Burma!

The happy land where the people smile and work for free!

Juli Mahr and **Sarah Sutcliffe** on Rangoon's move to lure foreign tourists and investors.

THE timing was shrewd, if a little obvious. The junta released Aung San Suu Kyi and simultaneously relaxed investment laws.

In a world where multinationals are forever on the look-out for the most immediate profit, the military junta appears to have pushed the right buttons. The carrots dangled are cheap labour, a wealth of natural resources and an emerging market. And the junta lays claim to an impressive track record – since 1989, SLORC sources say, they have managed to attract 160 foreign-investment projects worth three billion dollars.

Two-thirds of this is accounted for by oil and gas companies, with Texaco (US), Total (France), Premier (UK) and UNOCAL (US) topping the bill of those most eager to do business with one of the most undemocratic regimes in the world. Their role in bolstering the military dictatorship is immeasurable. Moreover, Total and Premier are now considering expanding their involvement in Burma.

The SLORC has also been wooing new investors – especially in the area of tourism and hotel development – with offers of ten-year tax-breaks and full repatriation of profits. Rothmans and Heineken are considering expanding their operations. But PepsiCo have been forced to sell their equity in a $15-million venture which produces 900,000 bottles a day owing to activist and consumer boycott threats in the US. Investment is doubly important for the Burmese regime. It provides money which directly finances a national budget of which 40 per cent is spent on the military. It also appears to lend the regime political legitimacy. An official of the junta recently claimed that the democracy movement was 'unnecessary' because the regime was attracting so much foreign investment.

Over half of the investment is coming from the Pacific region – from Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Japan. But 43 per cent comes from the West and Australia in spite of the fact that many Western governments claim not to encourage either trade with or investment in Burma. The British Government, for example, sponsored a trade mission to the country in February of this year. Of the 37 companies who went, 20 also received $1,500 grants to go towards the cost of the trip from the Government's Department of Trade and Industry. This trade mission came only weeks after 13 National League for Democracy supporters were arrested, as human-rights groups were quick to point out.

Tourist abuses

Meanwhile, the links between investment and human-rights abuses are becoming more direct and alarming. Groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have amply documented serious abuses such as forced labour and forced relocation taking place on a massive scale throughout the country. And there is a telling connection between human-rights violations and the industry the junta is currently most eager to promote – tourism.

Tourism is growing rapidly in Burma. In the year ending March 1995 there were more than 95,600 visitors – compared with under 9,000 in 1992. The junta is promoting 1996 as 'Visit Myanmar Year' and is hoping to encourage as many as 500,000 foreigners to holiday in Burma. The military authorities are keen to cash in on the world's fastest-growing industry, but to

VISIT
MYANMAR YEAR
1996

HOWARD J DAVIES

HOWARD J DAVIES

Japanese investors watching the sun set on whatever principles they might have had.

prepare for large-scale tourism they have been violating human rights on a massive scale – even by their own standards.

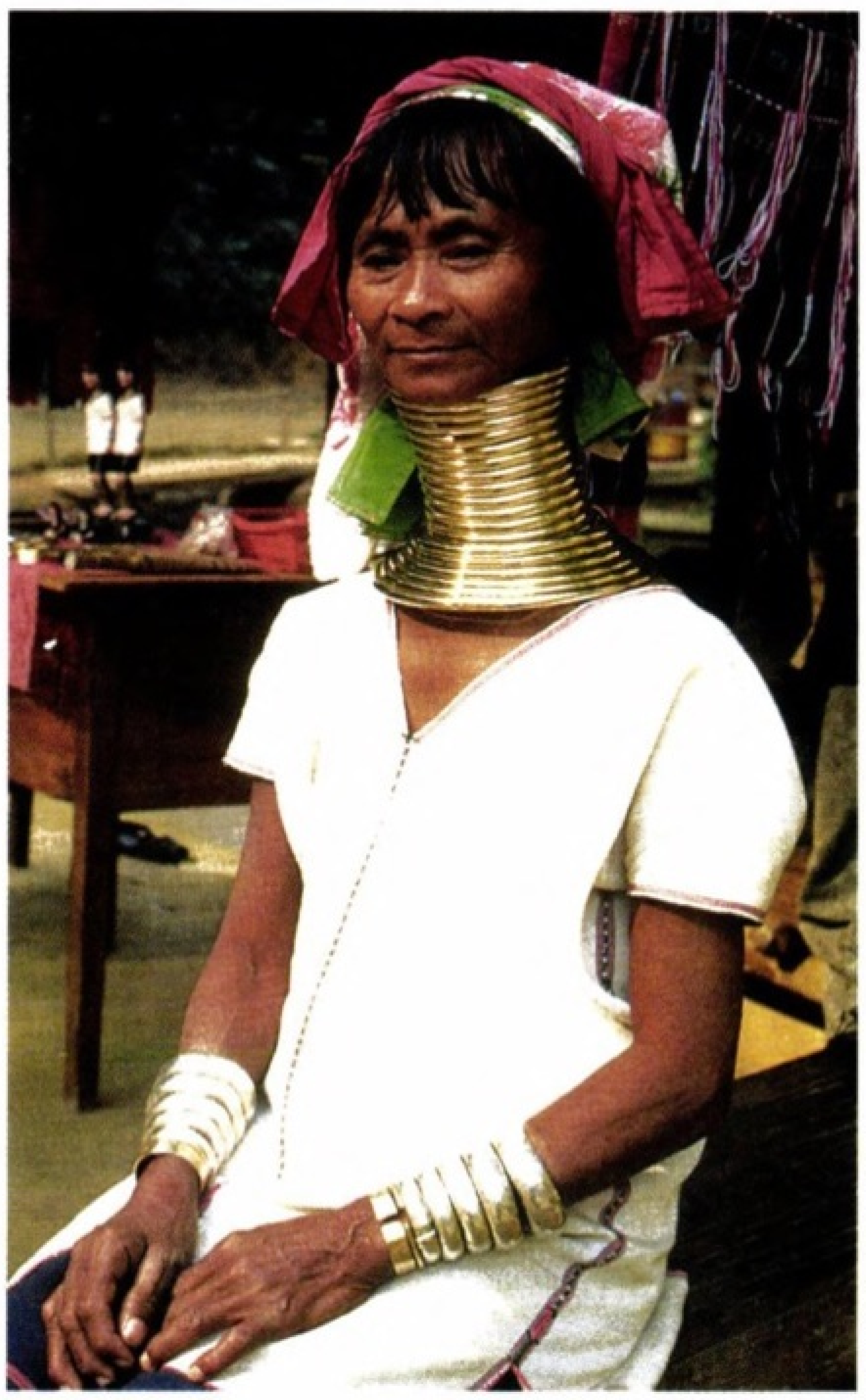
Whole communities have been forcibly relocated from their homes to make way for foreign hotels and to 'clean up' areas for the eyes of tourists. These communities are given no choice as to whether to move and where to move to. Neither do they receive compensation.

Thousands of people have been forced to work without pay on tourist sites – restoring the moat around Mandalay Palace, for example. Plans have been put into action to relocate the more 'picturesque' ethnic peoples to special villages where they can be visited by tourist groups in what amounts to a human zoo. Model villages for this purpose are under construction near Rangoon and some Padaung people have already been resettled to Inle Lake. There tourists can visit – for a charge – and take photos of 'long-necked' Padaung women.

Slave labour is also being used on a large scale to create the infrastructure needed for tourism. There are eyewitness accounts of shackled slaves being made to work on an extension of the Bassein airport. On the infamous Ye-Tavoy railway – started in 1993 – over 200,000 people have been forced to work and around 300 have lost their lives due to the appalling conditions. The railway will enable tourist-access to southern Burma. The Pantanaw-Einme motorway construction, which has also relied heavily on forced labour, has been speeded up especially for the 1996 'Year of the Tourist'. According to one man forced to work on the road: 'If they had stuck to the original schedule it would have been finished in 1997. But they wanted it to be ready in time for tourists... If the tourists knew what we had been through... How much we suffered...'

He added: 'I think those foreign tourists shouldn't come because if they come it will look like the SLORC Government is strong... and the military will grow more powerful.'

Indeed General Knin Nyunt, Head of


HOWARD J DAVIES

A Padaung woman turned into a tourist attraction at a 'model' village outside Rangoon.

The tale of the $32 shirt

A CLEAN, WELL-LIT shopping mall in Ottawa might seem a curious place to start exploring the story of how Burma's military rulers are lining their pockets and their arsenals at the expense of South-East Asia's worst-paid factory workers.

The story hangs on how a $32 shirt made in a trade-union-proof factory half a world away in Rangoon has come to sit on a sales rack in a Sears department store in Canada's capital. The entire monthly wage of a female piece-rate-paid worker in Burma equals roughly what it will cost some Ottawa shopper to buy this one product of her handiwork.

Although Thailand is still the region's largest clothing exporter, rising costs there are making Burma increasingly attractive to the international rag-trade. Labour in Rangoon is available at one-tenth the price of that in Bangkok.

International cargo records show that in September and October of 1994 alone, nearly ten tonnes of shirts from Burma were cleared through the port of Vancouver by the Canadian import-export company Spirito. Inexpensive men's shirts produced in low-wage Asian countries are its bread-and-butter. It markets them under the brand-name of Protocol: clothing 'Suited to Your State of Affairs'.

Thanks to mandatory country-of-registration labelling of all garments imported into Canada it has been possible to trace precisely where the $32-dollar Protocol shirt came from: a factory co-owned by SLORC and South Korea's largest industrial conglomerate, the Daewoo Group.

Before she got her job the woman who made this shirt most likely had to pay the Burmese Government a fee to be put on the list of the company's potential employees. The authorities like to control who is recruited to work in foreign-owned companies.

Back to the shirt. When it left Rangoon its declared value was two dollars. By the time it got to Vancouver it was worth five. After customs clearance and packaging it was worth ten. The wholesaler added his bit, as did Sears Canada – pushing the final price up to $32.19 including tax. All this from a shirt that earned the factory worker who made it mere pennies.

To make matters worse, the Daewoo factory in Rangoon where this shirt was produced has been the scene of considerable unrest recently. In 1995 factory-floor workers learned that managers were to be paid end-of-year production bonuses but they, the workers, were not. After they staged a sudden sitdown strike, Daewoo called in its corporate partner – the SLORC regime's light-industry ministry. This body quickly dispatched a paramilitary unit that threatened to shoot any garment workers who didn't go back to work immediately.

Companies that involve themselves in Burma's burgeoning garment-export trade are inevitably contributing to this kind of abuse – and to the military's weapons-purchasing power. But the good news is that some are being forced to pull out due to consumer protest.

Take Columbia Sportswear of Oregon. Until recently this upmarket US ski-wear designer utilized a factory in Burma owned partly by the junta's main investment arm – the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings (UMEH). The pact between the two companies meant that 16 cents of every dollar's profit on ski-wear exports to the US and Canada was being funnelled into the Burmese army's weapons-procurement program. Columbia refused to cut this link – until confronted with the threat of an America-wide consumer and retailer boycott of its $300-million-a-year trade in outdoor and recreational clothing, Burma-sourced or not. The message is getting through to consumers: every garment made in Burma and sold abroad helps buy bullets or worse. And to manufacturers: get out of Burma or we will stop buying your products. ■

Dave Todd is the former chief foreign-affairs correspondent for the Southam newspaper chain in Canada. He is now the special project co-ordinator for Canadian Friends of Burma.

Military Intelligence and one of SLORC's top brass, is a champion of tourism on the grounds that tourists will 'witness and realize the reality and the truth and this will replace the criticism of Myanmar abroad'.

Big international hotels, airport developments and shopping centres give the appearance of a thriving, stable country. But tourism is not the only sector being paid for with the suffering of the Burmese people. Oil companies such as UNOCAL and Total are involved in a controversial gas pipeline project which is being driven through territory from which indigenous communities are being forcibly relocated. To escape persecution by the military, refugees are fleeing across the border into Thailand.

STEVE LEHMAN / IMPACT

No confidence

In spite of the junta's grand claims of Burma being a hot business prospect investors are more cagey. The junta is suspected of manufacturing exaggerated investment figures to bolster the country's 'attractiveness'. It claims a nine-per-cent growth rate which financial analysts who know anything about the country find impossible to believe. Although the Government is keen to have funding from the World Bank and the IMF it does not have the confidence of either body. The most the IMF has been prepared to commit itself to is funding a project for statistical training in Burma.

Faced with a maze of bureaucratic procedures and the junta's habit of arbitrarily changing the rules, a group of US businesses have recently left the country for good. According to Khin Maung Kyi of the National University of Singapore, 'uncertainty, unpredictability, restrictions and controls and high transaction costs' were cited by the US companies as the reasons for leaving. Human rights were not a main reason, but they felt 'it was not worth staying in a country whose human-rights records were also being questioned'.

The world community might hope that Suu Kyi's release heralds a change for the better in Burma – but there is as yet little evidence to support this. The junta's position is unrelenting, and the words of Brigadier General David Abel, Minister for National Planning and Economic Development, speak for themselves. He told journalists recently that he was positive that investors were not hampered by political concerns: 'Money motivates men, big businessmen. Their motivation is to make money. If they can make money, why not? They are not worried about what politicians say.' ■

Sarah Sutcliffe and **Juli Mahr** are freelance writers and researchers who do campaigning work for the Burma Action Group in London, England.

ACTION

What can we do to bring the Burmese military to the negotiating table? Plenty, says activist **Simon Billenness.**

The story so far...

Using the tactics of the anti-apartheid campaign, activists in the US and Canada have caused **Amoco**, **Eddie Bauer**, **Liz Claiborne**, **Macy's** and **PetroCanada** to withdraw from Burma. In 1995 three US cities – **Berkeley**, **Madison** and **Santa Monica** – passed laws boycotting companies doing business in Burma. The **US Congress** is currently considering the 'Burma Freedom and Democracy Act' that would impose economic sanctions. Meanwhile the **European Union** is discussing imposing tariffs on Burmese-made goods.

Challenges ahead...

But many companies continue to ignore Aung San Suu Kyi's call for sanctions. They include **ARCO** (US), **Texaco** (US), **Total** (France), **UNOCAL** (US), **Premier** (UK) and **Heineken** (Holland). The latter plans to open up a brewery in partnership with a military-owned company.

What can I do?

● **Join your national Burma Action group.** Form a local Burma Action group with your friends and local activists. Brainstorm ideas for local campaigns in co-operation with your national Burma Action group.

● **Boycott companies that do business in Burma.** Write to the companies to tell them of your boycott and ask them why they refuse to respect the clearly stated wishes of the Burmese democracy movement.

● **Organize demonstrations** outside **Texaco** and **Total** gas stations. Return for a full refund any clothes marked 'Made in Myanmar' or 'Made in Burma' and tell the store why you won't wear them.

● **Ask your local councillors** to join other cities in boycotting corporations in Burma. Work for the passage of a law barring the city's purchasing managers from buying any goods or services from companies doing business in Burma. Such laws in the US have already cost these companies thousands in lost contracts. The laws also deter companies from going into Burma in the first place.

● **Write to top management** if you own stock in companies in Burma and attend the annual meeting to ask why they are supporting the Burmese military junta. Support shareholders' resolutions that ask companies to withdraw from Burma.

● **Ask your national parliament representatives** to introduce and support legislation imposing South Africa-style economic sanctions on Burma. Ask your prime minister or president to press for economic sanctions at the United Nations.

● **Do not holiday in Burma** until democracy has been restored. If you feel compelled to go at least get *Burma: the alternative guide* from the UK Burma Action Group (address below). Boycott travel agents advertising Burma holidays and tell them why you are doing so.

GROUPS

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THAILAND **Burma Issues**, PO Box 1076,
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Tourism Concern, Southlands College,
Wimbledon Parkside, London SW19 5NN.
Tel: (181) 944 0464. Fax: (181) 944 6583
E-mail: tourconcern@gn.apc.org

US **Franklin Research and Development**,
711 Atlantic Avenue, Boston, MA 02111.
Tel: (617) 423 6655 Fax: (617) 482 6179
E-mail: simon_billenness@cybercom.net
Human Rights Watch/Asia, 485 Fifth Avenue,
New York, NY 10017-6104. Tel: (212) 972 8400
Fax: (212) 972 0905 E-mail: hrwnyc@hrw.org

INTERNATIONAL **Free Burma Coalition**
website (with links to other Free Burma websites)
http://danenet.wicip.org/fbc/freeburma.html
http://sunsite.unc.edu/freeburma/freeburma.html

Worth Reading

Outrage: Burma's struggle for democracy by **Bertil Lintner**, White Lotus, London and Bangkok, 1990. ***Burma in Revolt: opium and insurgency since 1948*** by **Bertil Lintner**, White Lotus, Bangkok, 1994. ***Freedom from Fear*** by **Aung San Suu Kyi**, Penguin, London, revised 1995. ***Guide to Burma*** by **Nicholas Greenwood**,

The **NI** Interview

Leonardo Boff

Wayne Ellwood chats with one of Latin America's best-known exponents of liberation theology.

With his grizzled beard, relaxed manner and generous smile, Leonardo Boff is one of those people who puts you at ease before you know it.

He has been preaching an activist gospel in Brazil for decades. Although no longer a priest, Boff's not about to abandon his beliefs. 'I may have left the priesthood,' he chortles, 'but I have not left the faith. I am still a theologian and an active member of a Christian community in Brazil.'

In fact, Boff didn't exactly 'leave' the priesthood. He was more or less forced out nearly four years ago after a toe-to-toe battle with the Vatican over his penchant for mixing politics with religion. He has since married and settled into a university teaching position in Rio de Janeiro. I managed to catch up with him at the Jesuit Centre for Social Justice in Toronto.

In Brazil the excluded don't believe in the old myths of development anymore

'In many ways I am more estranged now than ever from the institutional Catholic Church,' Boff begins, easing into a battered office chair. 'What I've found as a layperson and a professor confirms this feeling. The sense of grace and holiness outside the Church actually seems much greater.' He laughs softly at the irony. 'People I work with now are committed to building a better world not because they are Christians but because they are profoundly human.'

Boff acknowledges the tremendous thirst for religion on the part of ordinary people, but says the Catholic Church itself is becoming increasingly irrelevant. Instead, the poor in Brazil find a vision of social justice and community in the *comunidades de base* or 'Base Christian Communities'. There are more than 100,000 of these grassroots Christian groups in Brazil which attempt to fuse the teachings of Christ with a liberating social gospel.

'These are the places where liberation theology is lived concretely and where the political dimensions of a liberating faith come into play,' Boff believes. 'The poor must understand that poverty is neither natural nor wanted by God. The *comunidades de base* show there can be another church and they continue to spawn leaders who work on behalf of the poor – in trade unions, political parties and in community organizations.'

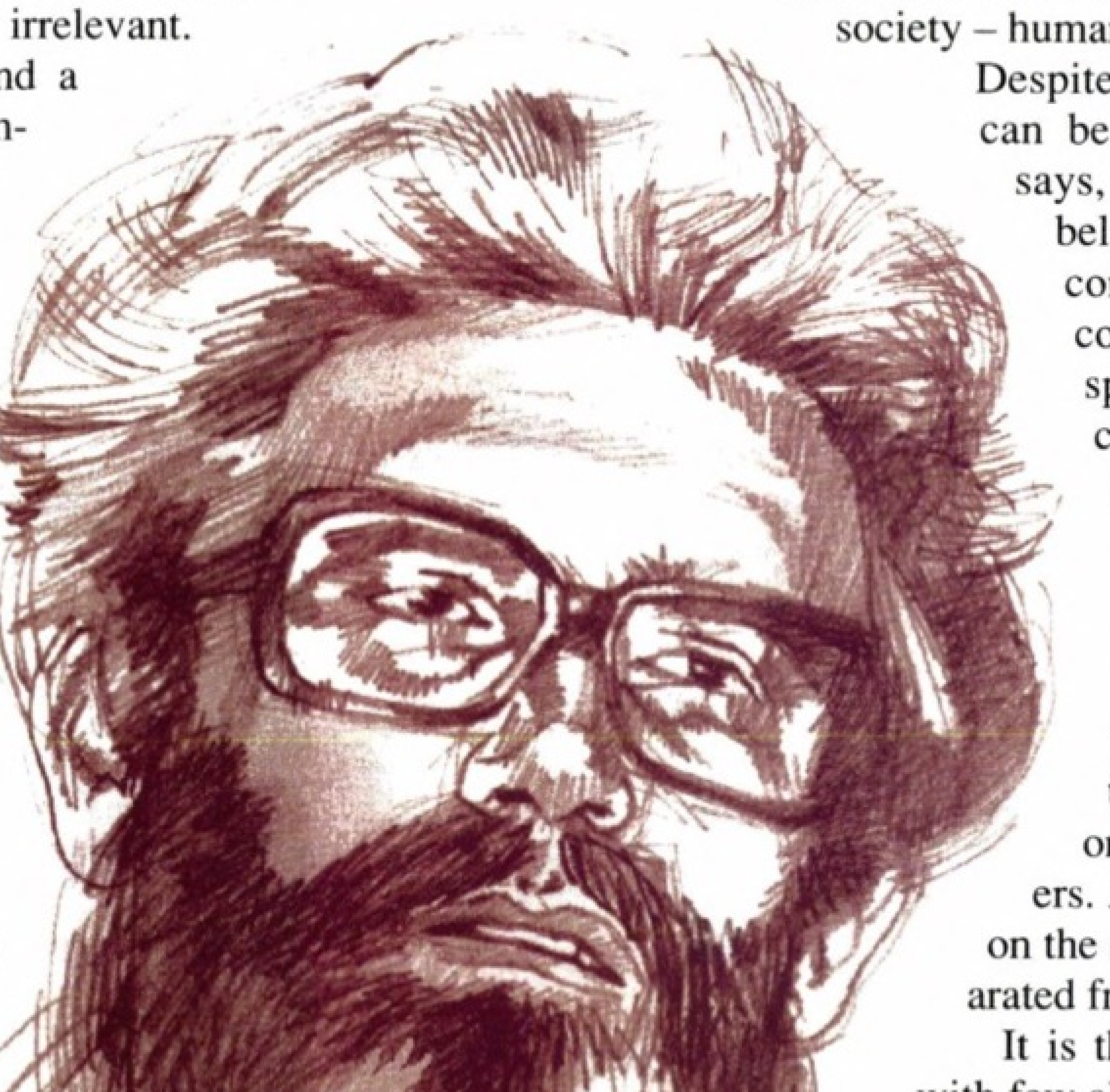


ILLUSTRATION BY ALAN HUGHES

Nonetheless, Boff admits the world has changed dramatically since the birth of liberation theology 20 years ago in Latin America. 'Today the problem is no longer marginalization of the poor but complete exclusion. The question now is how to survive. That's why liberation theology deals with fundamental issues like work, health, food, shelter and how we live.'

Economic globalization and the spread of poverty is of particular concern to Boff. 'The poor are much worse off today than 30 or 40 years ago,' he says flatly. 'In Brazil the excluded don't believe in the old myths of development anymore. They feel that development has been at their cost and not for their benefit.' And no wonder: 'Brazil has 150 million inhabitants. For a third of them the system functions very well. But for the other 100 million it is a disaster.'

Living in a country which has sparked world concern with the continued destruction of its Amazon rainforest, the ex-cleric is especially attuned to the ecological costs of industrial development. 'The earth has arrived at the limits of its sustainability with the result that we can no longer think of humanity apart from nature. We need an ecological spirituality which sees human beings as part of the whole. Our task is not to create sustainable development, but a sustainable society – human beings and nature together.'

Despite his anxiety about ecological collapse, Boff can be surprisingly upbeat. 'I am an optimist,' he says, unfolding his hands and smiling broadly. 'I believe a more spiritual globalization will also come. There is a growing consciousness of our common destiny, that we are all in the same spaceship together. It's true a few are in first-class and the rest in the baggage compartment. But we're going to have to learn to share or we'll all blow up together. When that becomes widely understood it will change both politics and economics.'

In the meantime, Boff argues, the first step toward change is for the poor to take charge of their own lives. 'The institutional Church counts on the support of the economic and political powers. And that is why the Church can no longer count on the support of the poor. They see the Church as separated from the Gospel and from the dream of Jesus.'

It is this kind of political analysis that has left Boff with few allies in Rome. As far as Boff is concerned, Pope John Paul II and his Vatican advisors have much to account for. 'The Pope's concern is to present the Church in the world from a position of power, not from a position of dialogue. This is an almost feudalistic approach.' He hesitates for a moment, pausing to enforce the cadence of his words. 'You see, I believe the Pope wants a Church of the rich for the poor, but not with the poor.' ■

Reviews

film

Le Confessionnal
directed by **Robert Lepage**

CANADIAN THEATRE DIRECTOR Robert Lepage – who established himself on the world stage with such dynamic and innovative pieces as *Needles and Opium* and *Tectonic Plates* – has made his cinema debut. The result is quite dazzling. **Le Confessionnal** is set in Quebec and spans a young lifetime as it moves between 1952 and the late 1980s. It pivots on an intriguing premise: in 1952 the master of suspense Alfred Hitchcock came to the French-Canadian city to film *I Confess* – about a young priest facing the death penalty because of his refusal to break his confidentiality vow over the confessional. Pierre Lamontagne (Lothaire Bluteau) was in his mother's womb at the time but that summer's events are key to him as he becomes involved in his adoptive brother Marc's (Patrick Goyette) search for his real father. Marc is very much the drifting sort who has abandoned his go-go dancer girlfriend to turn tricks for rich and influential Johns. This search for paternity is as much about finding roots and security.

Lepage's haunting, beguiling, labyrinthine thriller.

Out of this elegant conceit Lepage has created a compelling, labyrinthine thriller of sorts that makes atmospheric use of Quebec locations whether in scenes set in the underworldly aquarium or from the dizzy heights of the revolving restaurant from where the city looks as if it is swirling out like a glittering fabric. The director has a sharp eye and has come up with some haunting, at times beguilingly, abstract images. But **Le Confessionnal**'s ultimate strength is in its astute examination of the questions that it raises – whether about Catholicism and how it has evolved over the last 30 or so years, or about the complex nexus of the family. But ultimately Lepage's film is a brilliant triumphing of Oedipal anxieties. As such it is a modern day tragedy that would have Sophocles quaking.

Entertainment ☆☆☆
Politics☆☆☆
LF

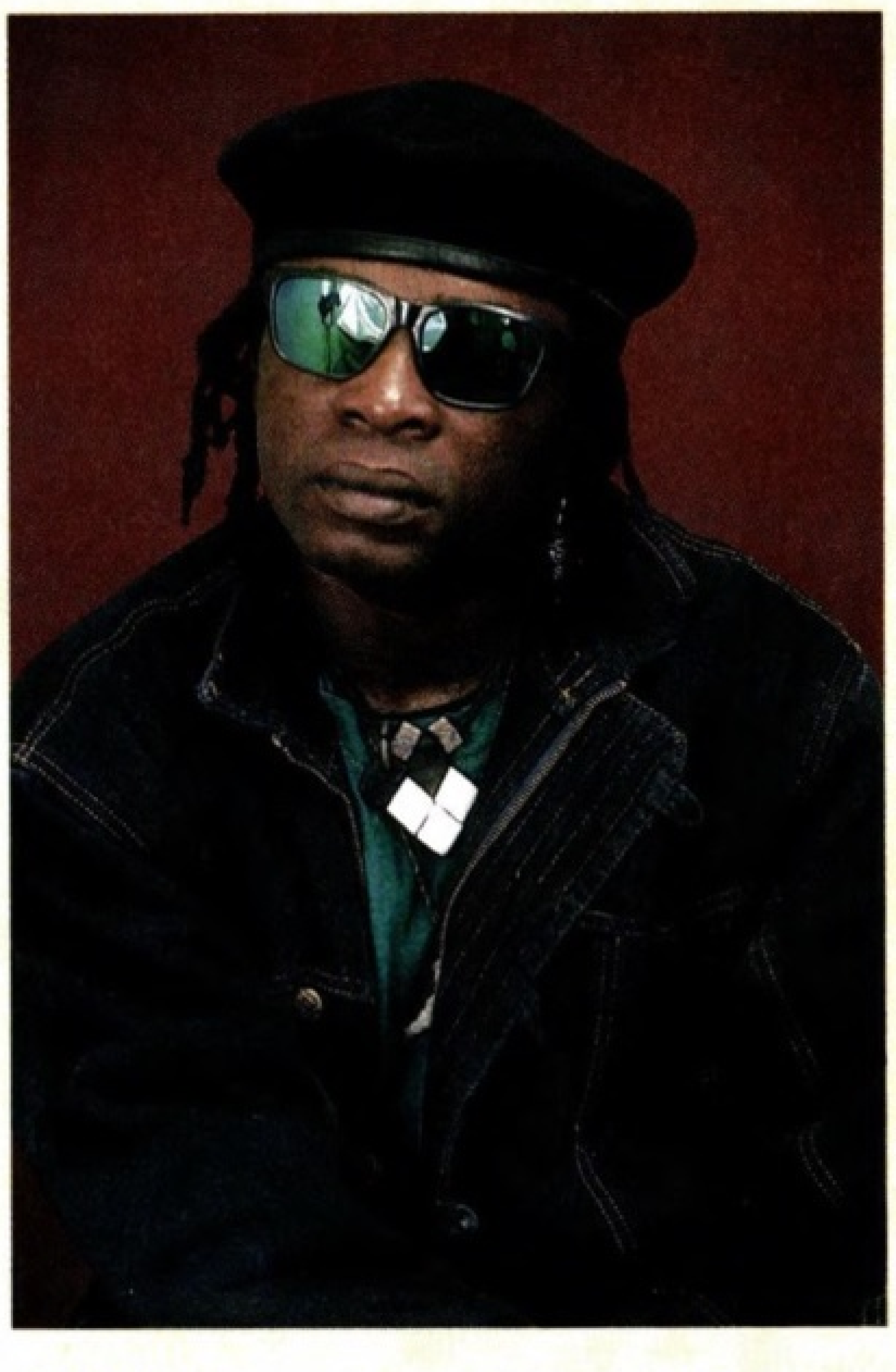
music

Wass Reggae
by **Askia Modibo**
(Stern's Africa STCD 1060)

BURSTING INTO LIFE with a tight, cantering rhythm, Askia Modibo's *Wass Reggae* is an intriguing record. It fuses the insinuating rhythms of his native Malian Wassoulou music with a soulful reggae sweetness that owes more to Bob Marley than dub's darker spaces. And, unusually, it combines the spirit of both musics without losing any sense of its own cultural identity.

Modibo's musical life started as a shepherd boy singing traditional Bambara songs. He then took in a wealth of US soul classics – notably James Brown – and then did a stint with Ivory Coast's reggae star Alpha Blondy and Le Super Tentemba. Modibo uses reggae's propulsive rhythms to fuel songs that variously offer advice, deplore the traffic jams of Bamako and question the relationship between Africa and the West. All this and a low-level dose of piety thrown in.

But it's as a football fanatic that Modibo is also known. Many of this album's 11 songs – sung, incidentally, in Bambara with a smattering of French and English thrown in – appeared two years ago on *Les Aigles*, a cassette dedicated to Mali's national team. In fact, 'Les Aigles du Mali' is one of **Wass Reggae**'s centre points: a hunting song updated with shots of rock-steady brass and spliced with recordings of cheering crowds. Its passion is translated to other aspects of Malian life: 'Circulation de Bamako' details in both word and rhythm the frustrations of being caught up in one of Africa's worst traffic jams. An odd subject to sing about, perhaps, but why not? After all, this is a record firmly rooted in Modibo's own territory.


Askia Modibo: mixing politics, football, piety and delight.

The Malian Wassoulou sound has, in recent years, been dominated by female artists of international calibre – Oumon Sangaré, Nahawa Doumbia and Dieneba Diakité are all worth checking out. Modibo's approach shares their flexible, lilting vocals and he has a pleasing tenor voice capable of punctuating melodies with numerous twists and turns. But he favours a more Western instrumentation; his band is very much the exemplar of the African dance band – guitars, keyboards, percussion and a lively horn section.

Modibo tackles a wide range of contemporary themes: 'Ou Va l'Afrique?', 'Devaluation' and 'Immigration Zero' (the title taken from a French anti-immigration speech made by minister Charles Pasqua) have a continent-wide, if not global, relevance. And peace is the motivating message of much of the album. 'Stop war!' he sings in a style which is pure Marley with a chorus echoing the message in three languages. It's an emphatic point made with musical rigour and delight.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment☆☆☆
LG

books

Workers in an Integrating World: World Development Report 1995

by **The World Bank**

(Oxford University Press ISBN 0-19-521102-2)

THE WORLD BANK'S current charm offensive means that the human dimension (known to journalists as 'colour') now features more prominently than before in its annual Development Report. So the latest of these reports is dotted with little stories about the little people called 'workers' whose best interests the Bank carries very close to its heart.

'Economic growth,' it instructs us, 'is good for workers'. Full stop. Thanks for the tip, chief!

'Toys from China,' it continues, 'copper from Chile, rice from Thailand – trade in goods and increasingly in services is the most important and most stable form of economic contact with the rest of the world for Joe, Maria and Xiao Zhi.' Sure thing, *jefe*!

It's a bit odd, though. Toy factories in China kill people in fires; copper miners in Chile get maimed by explosives and knocked about by bits of rock or military thugs; rice farmers in Thailand fall sick from pesticide poisons. Not worth a mention?

From what little we can discover about them in this report, we know that 'Joe' in fact works in a bank in Texas, 'Maria' in an export-only *maquila* factory in Mexico and 'Xiao Zhi' in a Hong-Kong-owned textile factory in Southern China. They figure not as workers but as beneficiaries of the 'integrating world' that the World Bank advocates with semi-mystical zeal.

The **Report** whispers in passing that between 1970 and 1990 industrial wages in the South – where 80 per cent of the world's industrial labour force is now located – either stagnated or declined everywhere except in East Asia and the Pacific. Not so wonderful for workers, you'd have thought. The World Bank has presided over this fiasco. It shows no sign of wishing to preside over anything else.

So, despite the colourful company of 'Joe', 'Maria' and 'Xiao Zhi', you can read this dismal document without feeling that you've come into contact with anything even remotely resembling a human being. In fact, you begin to doubt whether the three of them can ever have existed at all.

Politics ☆

Entertainment ☆

DR

STAR RATING

Excellent	☆☆☆☆☆
Very good	☆☆☆☆
Good	☆☆☆
Fair	☆☆
Poor	☆

Reviews by **Louise Gray, Lizzie Francke** and **David Ransom**
Reviews editor: **Vanessa Baird**

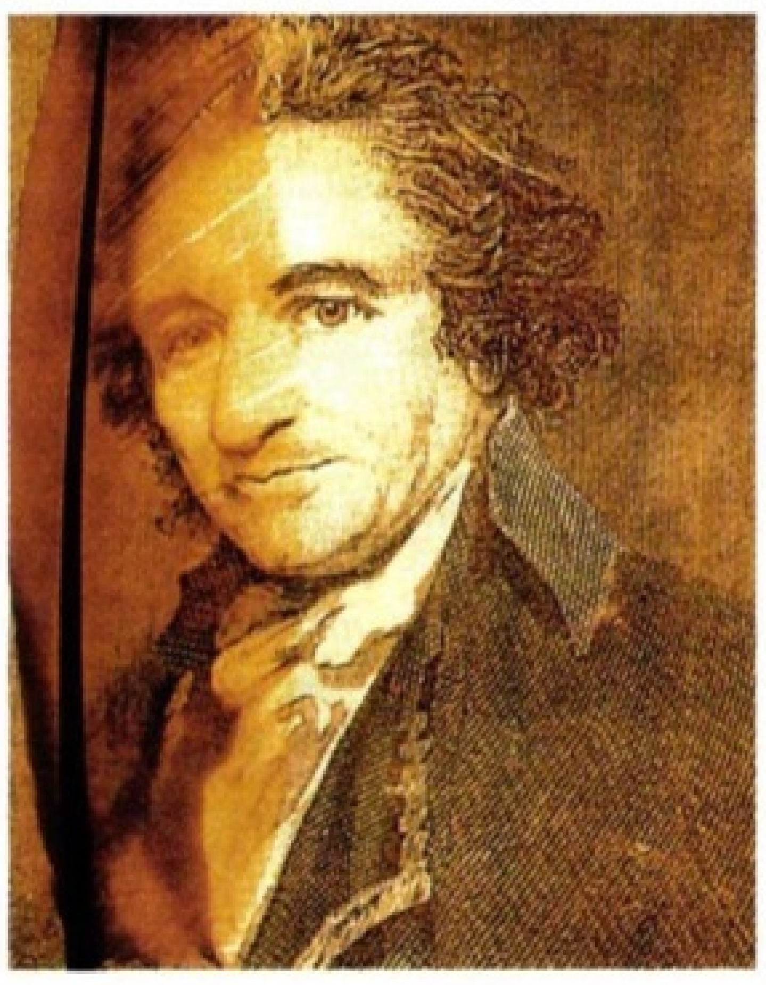
THE CLASSIC

Commonsense and Rights of Man

...being the books that inspired at least two major revolutions.

AS A CHILD I had a picture book which attempted to convey history through accounts – heavily edited – of the lives of important individuals. Among the many oddities of this 'Great Man' approach was the way the central figures were imbued with *all* the virtues and made every critical decision alone, without consultation. Thus, Drake thwarted the Armada, Wellington defeated Napoleon in single combat and George Washington begat the American Revolution in splendid isolation. In fact, Washington was a very reluctant rebel and if any one man can be said to have been the architect of the US it is not the army commander and first President but an Englishman from Thetford entirely absent from my child's history book: Tom Paine.

Uniquely, Paine was both an inspiration to and a central figure in revolts on two continents: the American and the French revolutions. His writing, particularly **Commonsense** and **Rights of Man,** sold in vast quantities and have been hailed or blamed as being instrumental in fomenting uprisings the world over. How did the self-taught son of a poor corset-maker achieve such worldwide fame?



Born in 1737 on the street leading to the local gallows, Paine was obliged by family poverty to leave school early and follow his father's trade as staymaker. When the corset trade declined he was forced to seek alternative careers and was – variously – a tax collector, schoolteacher and merchant seaman. Extreme poverty continued to dog his footsteps and he leaped at the chance to travel to America in 1774, where, under the patronage of Benjamin Franklin, he became a freelance journalist. His pamphlet **Commonsense** was published in January 1776 and was an immediate success, selling more than 150,000 in America alone. Paine's invective against the monarchy and his contention that the colonies had rights that superseded their obligations to the King caused outrage across the Atlantic but struck a chord in the infant nation.

Paine entered the struggle for independence wholeheartedly, becoming a militiaman and observer with Washington's rag-tag army. If **Commonsense** set out the philosophical underpinning of the American Revolution then his series of 16 propaganda tracts, entitled *Crisis*, bolstered the morale of the rebels at the crucial moment when the revolt looked like foundering. The opening tract gives a good flavour of Paine's rhetorical spirit:

'These are the times that try men's souls... Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: 'Tis dearness only that gives every thing its value.'

Paine continued to serve the cause of the revolution. He became Secretary to the Congress' Foreign Affairs Committee, in which capacity he made several visits to Paris. When the War for Independence was won, Paine – who had refused any payments for his propaganda writing – was given a farm in New York and enough money to make him comfortable. Such leisure allowed him to indulge in his lifelong fascination for science.

But in 1787 his passion for politics drew him back and he spent the next 15 years of his life engaged on shuttle diplomacy between France and England and as an active participant in the French Revolution. Paine's exploits in republican France made his American experiences seem tame. He helped draft the Declaration of the Rights of Man and was elected deputy to the National Assembly. He wrote his most famous work **Rights of Man**, setting out his doctrine of natural rights and his opposition to inherited privilege, in response to an attack on the French Revolution by the Tory philosopher Edmund Burke.

Paine spoke out bravely against the execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette and he opposed the growing Terror in which the Jacobin Revolution became a hideous, self-consuming engine of death. Arrested on the orders of Robespierre, he escaped the guillotine only because of an error in the marking of his cell door. Released after the fall of Robespierre, he continued to speak and write on the subject of liberty and returned to America, his adopted homeland, in 1802 – dying peacefully there seven years later at the age of 72.

Thomas Paine was a supreme popularizer of ideas and a peerless propagandist for the cause of human liberty. His writings are a challenging contribution to an argument that continues today: what is the most just form of government and how may we best achieve it? Paine's legacy to us, in his passionate words and his exemplary life, is that the first and foremost step on the road is, steadfastly and fearlessly, to speak the truth to power. ■

Peter Whittaker

Commonsense and ***Rights of Man*** are available in a number of editions including Penguin. A new biography ***Tom Paine: a Political Life*** by **John Keane** is published by Bloomsbury (London, 1995).

Curiosities

QUESTIONS THAT HAVE ALWAYS INTRIGUED YOU ABOUT THE WORLD WILL APPEAR IN THIS, YOUR SECTION, AND BE ANSWERED BY OTHER READERS. PLEASE ADDRESS YOUR ANSWERS AND QUESTIONS TO 'CURIOSITIES'.

How are the features added onto a globe? I can think of no convincing way that complex images could be printed directly onto a sphere without distortion or numerous joins.

● A Coke can starts out as a disc with the painted artwork radially distorted – like one of those Victorian trick pictures that must be viewed in a cylindrical mirror. It is then pressed – or extruded – over a cylindrical mould and, presto, the familiar design appears in all its glory. I imagine the same process is used with a hemispherical press to make globes. And how fitting that a coke can should provide an example of the way in which a distorted view of the world becomes, via projection and manipulation, the standard model which shapes our perceptions!

Jason Mills
Accrington, England

Is it proven that long-lived creatures carry the same DNA throughout their lives?

● Yes. When we are conceived the fertilized egg contains a full set of chromosomes. These contain the DNA that carries the instructions to make 'us' and all the proteins and enzymes our bodies need to survive. As the foetus grows, cells divide many times, each cell containing an exact copy of the original DNA. This process of cell division is called mitosis. It's also the means by which, throughout our lives, we replace old cells that die. In theory each new cell is an exact copy of our original DNA.

However, the process of ageing may be caused by an accumulation of very minor errors that occur during mitosis – a sort of genetic 'Chinese whispers'. As the errors in DNA replication accumulate the cells produced become less efficient.

Mark Watson
Bristol, England

● No. Long-lived creatures do not carry exactly the same DNA throughout their lives because minor changes are always occurring. The changes aren't large – human DNA for example remains recognizably human. But DNA changes occur because of mutations or copying errors. This DNA mutation is speeded up by toxic chemicals or radiation and pollution can be an important factor in this. Copying errors occur as bodies grow and DNA is copied into new cells. Consequently the older we are, the more cell divisions we have had – so the greater the chance that mistakes have happened. This is a bit like making a series of photocopies where each time the previous copy is the one used. The more copies you make, the more blurred the picture gets.

Fortunately, cells also contain complicated repair systems which check up on and fix damaged bits of DNA. However, the older we get the less effective are these repair mechanisms and some damage gets past them. This often leads to cancer. Obviously the longer we live the more likely we are to have such damaged DNA and that is why cancer is largely a disease of the old.

If changes occur to the DNA in the sex cells, in the ovaries or testes, then these changes can be passed on to offspring. Most DNA changes are the raw material of evolution. Unfortunately, though, some of these inheritable DNA changes are harmful and embryos containing them either die or produce children born with genetic diseases like haemophilia or muscular dystrophy.

Mel Bass
Carmathen, Wales

AWAITING YOUR ANSWERS

Does anyone know how the Chinese custom of foot-binding originated?

PM Tammik
Malaga, Spain

Where are all the cows that supply 100-percent beef for all the McDonalds' around the world? And who is sacrificing grain and water to this end?

Natalie Kelly
Taipei, Taiwan

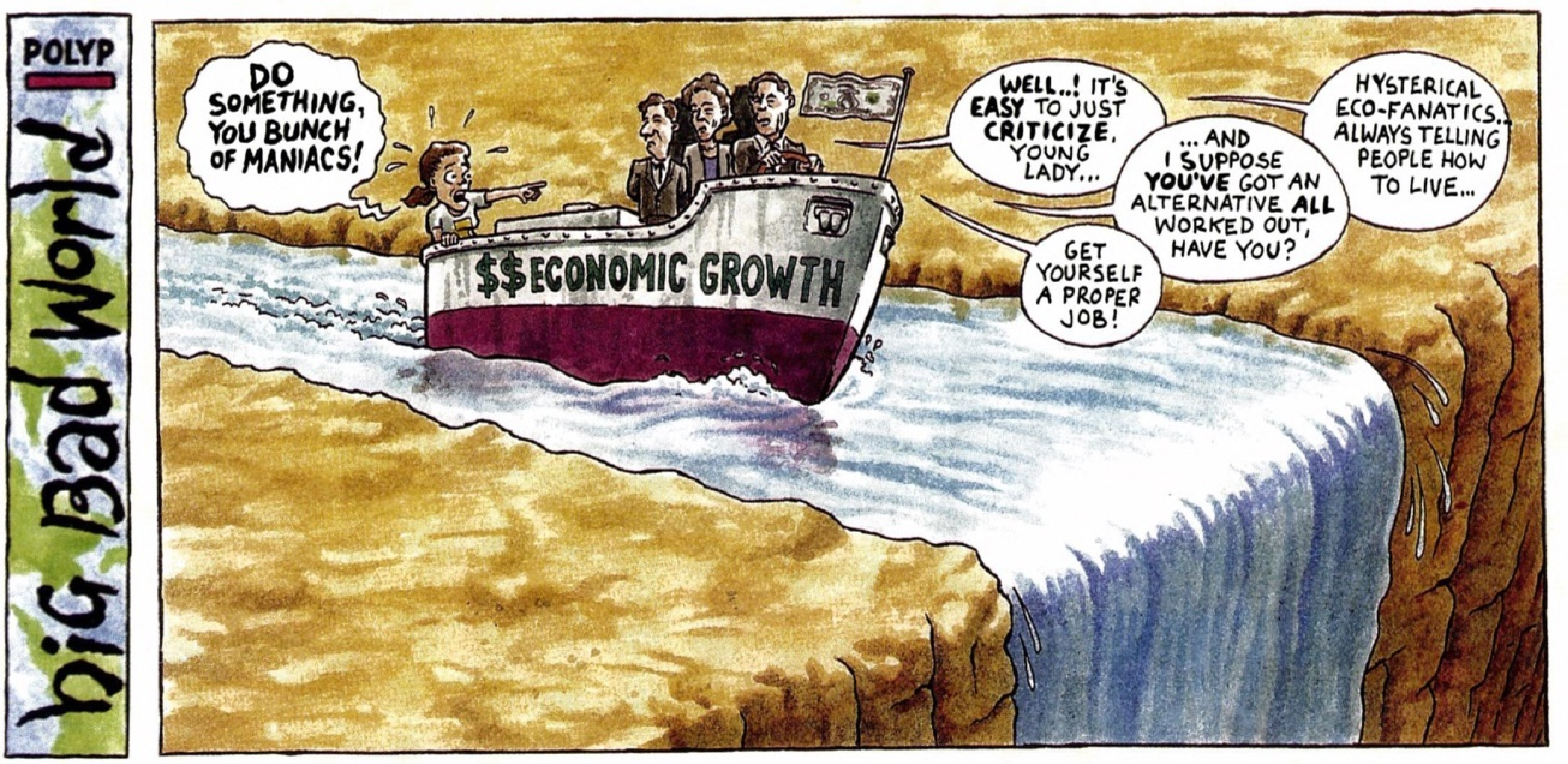
When oil or gas is extracted does this not leave a cavity? Is it filled? And if so, by what?

Arnold Fullerton
Devizes, England

Has anyone fully compared the costs of road transport against rail transport?

Tracy Lean
Nottingham, England

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR ANSWERS PLEASE SEND THEM TO **CURIOSITIES, NEW INTERNATIONALIST, 55 RECTORY ROAD, OXFORD OX4 1BW, UK,** OR TO YOUR LOCAL NI OFFICE (SEE INSIDE FRONT COVER FOR ADDRESSES). THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS SECTION ARE NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF THE **NI**.


POLYP
big Bad World
DO SOMETHING, YOU BUNCH OF MANIACS!
$$ECONOMIC GROWTH
WELL..! IT'S EASY TO JUST CRITICIZE, YOUNG LADY...
...AND I SUPPOSE YOU'VE GOT AN ALTERNATIVE ALL WORKED OUT, HAVE YOU?
HYSTERICAL ECO-FANATICS.. ALWAYS TELLING PEOPLE HOW TO LIVE...
GET YOURSELF A PROPER JOB!

Here's the beef

The grand opening of McDonald's first fast-food restaurant in South Africa heralds bad news for the health of the nation, says **Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala**.

THE CAMERA ZOOMS in on a young African couple emerging from a church. Newly married, neatly permed and wearing the very latest in expensive Western wedding garb, they head for the groom's sleek sports car under a hail of rice. Out onto the highway and off they go, alone at last. As they glance lovingly at each other they catch a glimpse of the Golden Arches in their rear-view mirror. The honeymoon can wait! McDonald's beckons!

Amid the smiles of the restaurant's mainly white clientele our bride and groom make their grand entrance. They place their orders with a pair of bubbly, eager white girls behind the counter, then settle down at a small table to bite into what their faces tell us could only be sheer ecstasy between a bun. Before they take that second rapturous bite a small, white child bounces to their table and presents them with a flower. Our couple is overwhelmed. Could the new South Africa be more perfect? The image disappears from our TV screens, and a manly voice reads the solemn words below: 'McDonald's – we're here to share your life.'

For better or for worse, McDonald's has arrived in South Africa. The hype surrounding the grand opening of their Johannesburg store came complete with balloons, TV and radio personalities, flyers, musical bands and a throng of people who just came to see what all the excitement was about. Ample newspaper coverage was assured by an on-going legal battle between McDonald's the multinational giant and MacDonald's the local fast-food franchise, which took advantage of the sanction years to register a similar name and a yellow-arched logo of its own.

Opening day at McDonald's was heralded by an American-style parade which marched to the doors and was met by an African Church choir singing soulful Christian songs in Xhosa and Zulu. At last the Pearly Gates – or rather the Golden Arches – were about to open. The patient masses, many of whom had camped out on the pavement overnight, began to press forward. As they rushed inside, an inspired master of ceremonies made his final decree through a loudspeaker: 'McDonald's – no country is complete without one.'

One could argue that it's time for South Africans to enjoy a bit of fun and games, time for the people to relax with a bit of mindless entertainment and tasteless multinational junk food, after all the years of battle against apartheid's reign of terror. As disillusion begins to set in, with the lack of new job opportunities or any noticeable difference in the material conditions of life for the majority, perhaps an evening with the Cosby Show can provide a glimmer of hope for a better life. Having the 'young lions of the revolution' (as youth was called several years ago) mesmerized in front of a TV set in a shack and dreaming of an outing to McDonald's might keep them away from crime, drugs and the gangsterism which has rapidly become a way of life for well-armed, well-trained township youths with nothing better to do.

Before the grand opening a team of high-powered McDonald's consultants flew down here to do their market research. They drew up detailed consumer profiles and assessed their profit potential for the country as a whole. In the end they decided to take advantage of the influx to Johannesburg of people fleeing unemployment in the rural areas, or violence and overcrowding in the established peri-urban townships.

McDonald's Inc see their entry as a way of meeting the demand among this growing urban population for relatively cheap and easily available sustenance. What they seem to have failed to notice is that these new urban settlers, most of whom live from hand to mouth in make-shift cardboard shacks on illegally occupied land, are hardly likely to head for McDonald's. More likely they'll be found scavenging a 'fast-food fix' from the municipal garbage dumps.

But the global king of burgers is not to be deterred. As franchise-consultant partner Bendeta Parker put it: 'The process of changing the lower-income market's traditional eating habits from things like sour milk and unprocessed foods to chips, burgers and a milkshake will be costly and timely, but will inevitably yield high returns over the longer term.'

No doubt profiteers will make a killing. But who will benefit? The new health ministry is struggling to provide basic health services like clean water, immunizations and trained community healthcare workers to stem the high morbidity and mortality rates, which are on par with other poor African countries. Meanwhile the incidence of diabetes, cancer, heart disease and hypertension is growing at a phenomenal rate, especially among Africans. There's never been much resistance to changing from traditional high-fibre, natural diets to high-fat, over-refined Western eating habits. McDonald's can feel good about that.

In the words of the youth who came to chant on opening day: 'Viva McDonald's! Viva Big Mac!' ■

Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala is Lecturer in Anthropology at the University of Durban-Westville, Kwazulu Natal, South Africa.

For more information on campaigns worldwide visit the McSpotlight website – **http://www.mcspotlight.org**

Country profile

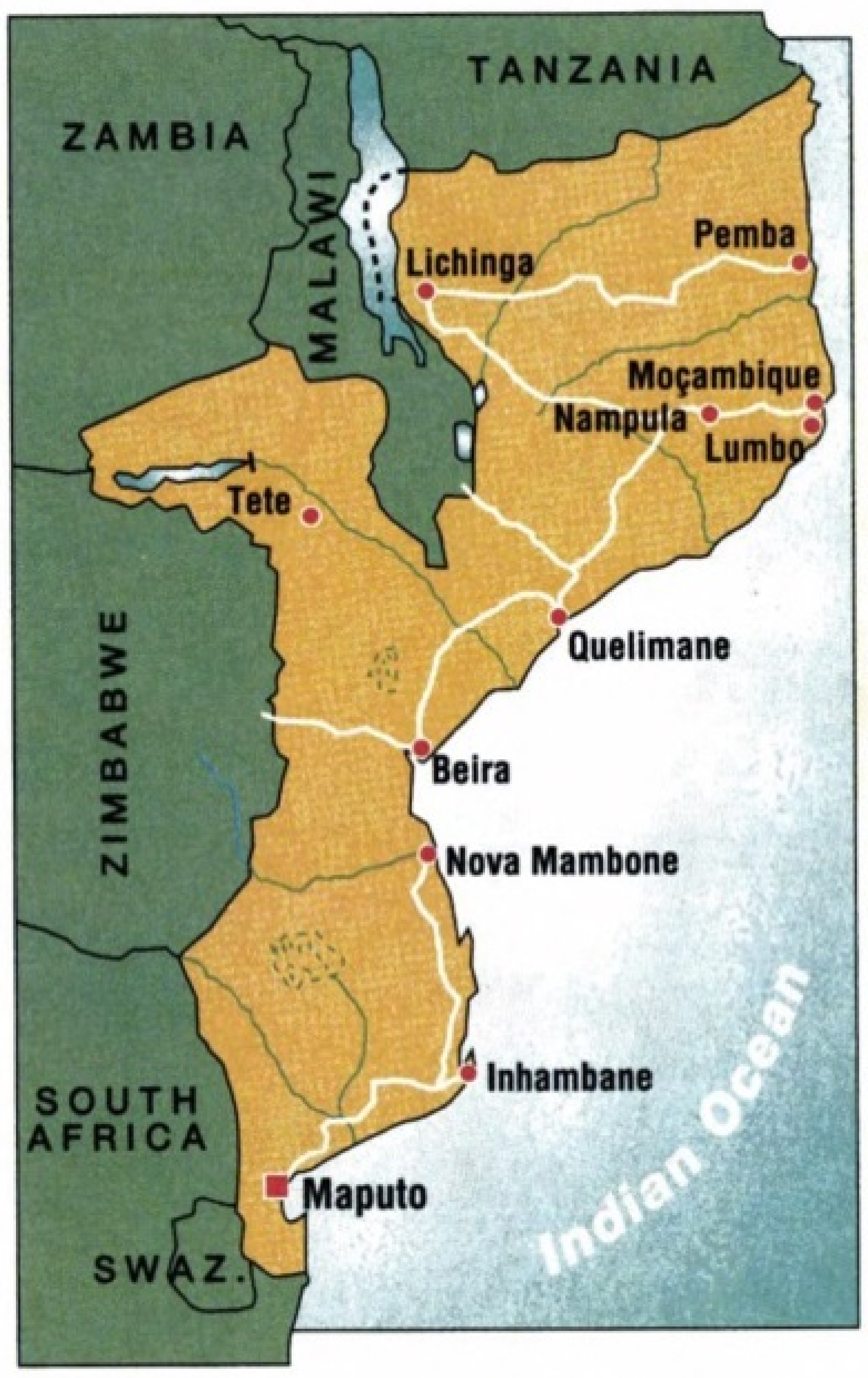
Mozambique

Across the bay from Maputo, Mozambique's capital, is a stretch of coastline known as Catembe. It was here that the colonial Portuguese had their beach houses and spent their weekends in the sun. During the civil war the fighting reached Catembe and the residents of Maputo would sit in their apartments watching Frelimo and Renamo, government and rebels respectively, battle it out.

Although Catembe is less than ten minutes away from Maputo by ferry, it is a different world. The locals live largely off the land and sea and the occasional tourist nostalgic for prawns. Doors are never locked and the security industry, which is thriving in Maputo, is non-existent.

'Here it is good,' said one local, looking across the water to Maputo. 'There it is bad – the people must go home now.'

This illustrates one of the biggest problems in Mozambique. During the war huge tracts of land were laid with mines. This and a devastating drought resulted in refugees pouring into the cities. Maputo has an estimated population of two million, the vast majority clustered around the city in mud and grass huts. Everyone agrees that the city cannot support these numbers but people have adopted an attitude of 'better the devil you know' and stayed on. As a result while Mozambique's economy depends on agriculture, today millions of hectares of extremely fertile land are lying fallow. To add to this major economic problem, what little industry was left after the Portuguese departed was killed off by the Frelimo Government's hopelessly mismanaged Marxist policies.



Chad
Sudan
Nigeria
Central Africa
Ethiopia
Somalia
Kenya
Uganda
Rwanda
Burundi
Zaire
Tanzania
Comoros
Angola
Zambia
Malawi
Zimbabwe
Namibia
Botswana
Madagascar
Swaziland
Lesotho
South Africa

But times have changed. The 1992 peace accord and the 1994 election went off as smoothly as anyone could have hoped. Frelimo is still in power but these days it has different priorities. And through careful planning and marketing, the economy is slowly picking up.

The three major cities of Maputo, Beira and Nampula are all humming with construction work, and foreigners are filling the luxury hotels, eyeing up potential business. The Frelimo Government has cut out almost all the excruciatingly slow red tape involved in investing in the country and is welcoming anyone with a lucrative proposal. Some observers are worried the Government is being overzealous and inviting people who are more interested in milking the country than in feeding it.

South Africa played a major part in destabilizing the country in the 1980s by supplying arms to the rebel Renamo movement. Now, in its post-apartheid form, it is seen as Mozambique's hope for economic rebirth. Most of the foreign companies, including a plethora of tourism operators, are owned by South Africans and many management positions are filled by them too. Given time and economic uplift, the more astute will begin to question the intelligence of South African 'economic colonization'. And plenty of problems require urgent attention if the country is to rebuild – among them extreme poverty, lack of education, the minute middle class and a high level of corruption in the bureaucracy.

But for the moment people are revelling in the peace and relative economic expansion. Mozambique is still very near the bottom of the international pile in terms of wealth, but there is an unmistakable optimism on the streets. Its citizens are prepared to forgive the past and prepare for the future. ■

Nico Zaverdinos

AT A GLANCE

VANESSA BAIRD

Leader Joaquim Chissano of Frelimo (Frente de Libertacao de Moçambique)

Economy GNP per capita just $90 – the lowest in the world (South Africa $2,980).
Monetary unit: Metical
Main exports: Prawns (46%), cashew nuts (15%), petroleum products (13%).
Main imports: Machinery and equipment (38%), food and consumer goods (37%), raw materials (17%)
External debt: $5.26 billion (1993)
Natural gas has been discovered and oil prospectors believe there is a major field in the country. Mineral resources waiting to be exploited include iron, graphite, fluorites and bauxite. Tourism, which was a major income source under the Portuguese, is a small but thriving industry. Many state-owned businesses have been privatized.

People 15.5 million. Population growth rate 1.8% per year, one of the lowest in the developing world.

Health Infant mortality 161 per 1,000 live births (Canada 6 per 1,000).

Culture The variety of ethnic groups are mainly of Bantu origin. Tsongu and Changone dominate in the south; Sera and Macondo in the north-east. There are also European and Asian minorities.
Religion: Rural people practise traditional animism but Christianity and Islam dominate in the towns. Islam is strongest in the north.
Languages: Portuguese is the official language but most people speak Bantu languages such as Swahili and Macoa-Lomne.

Sources *The World: A Third World Guide 1995/96; State of the World's Children 1996, UNICEF; The World of Information Africa Review 1996.*

Previously profiled May 1981.

NI star rating

EXCELLENT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
FAIR	★★★
POOR	★★
APPALLING	★

STAR RATINGS

INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★
Widespread poverty with an élite high-income group. Small middle class.
1981 ★★★

SELF-RELIANCE ★★
Very dependent on foreign aid but trying to create a homespun economy. Looking to South Africa and Northern countries for investment.
1981 ★★★

POSITION OF WOMEN ★★★
The constitution enshrines women's rights and women are well represented in government. But they are still treated as inferior.
1981 ★★★

LITERACY ★
Estimated at 17%. Practical education (including basic literacy) and health are listed as top priorities by the Government.
1981 ★

FREEDOM ★★★
Constitutionally enshrined but in reality there is still police brutality and protests are not exactly welcomed. Free and spirited media.
1981 ★★★

LIFE EXPECTANCY ★
At 46 years, the sixth-lowest in the world.
1981 ★

POLITICS

NI ASSESSMENT ★★★
Despite corruption, poverty and a militant opposition, the Frelimo Government is pulling Mozambique out of its tailspin. Frelimo has to walk the tightrope between foreign investment and economic imperialism, but the economy is likely to grow fast. Freedom and democracy are heavily defended by the urban population.

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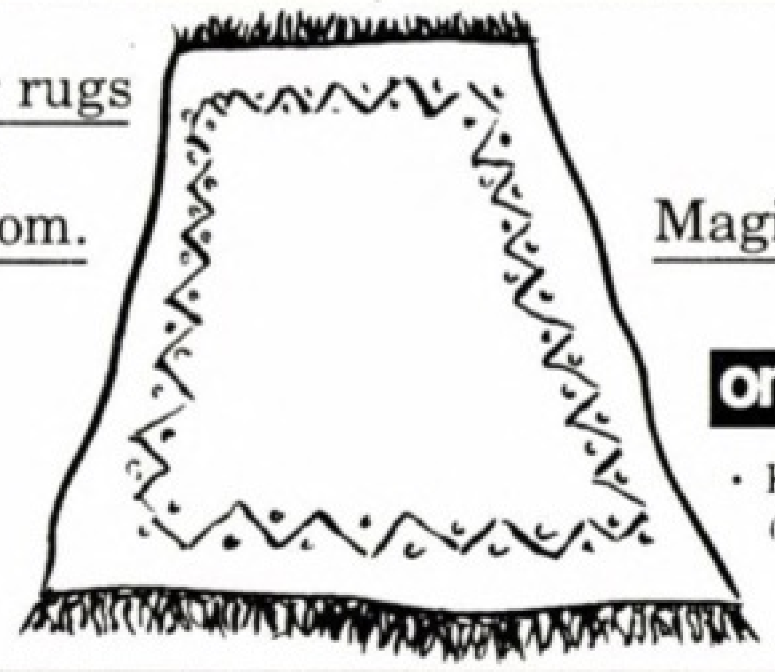

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British Council International Seminars

Women working for change (9629)

10 to 18 September 1996 *London*
Directed by Professor Angela Coyle and Ms Reena Bhavnani

The seminar will provide opportunities for participants to gain both theoretical and practical experience of approaches to policy development and the management of change in relation to women's matters.

Main themes will include:

- management of change
- strategies for women in development
- campaigning

The programme will be of particular interest to women working in management or policy development roles, from both the public service, non-governmental organisations or from campaigning groups.

Fee: £1,390 (residential)

Learning for sustainable lifestyles: national strategies for environmental education (9667)

28 July to 3 August 1996 *Edinburgh*
Directed by Professor John C Smythe OBE

The aims of this seminar are to encourage, assist, enrich and enhance the further development of national strategies as a framework within which Learning for Sustainable Lifestyles can be effectively accomplished. It will offer participants the chance to examine and discuss the process of developing and implementing national strategies for environmental education, and compare the Scottish experience with processes and opportunities in their own countries.

The programme will be of particular interest to decision makers and policy makers in central and local government, educational institutions, industry and non-governmental organisations.

Fee: £1,400 (residential)

Reconstruction after disaster: issues and practices (9695)

1 to 7 September 1996 *Newcastle*
Directed by Dr Adenrele Awotona

The seminar will review state of the art practice and provide in-depth understanding of the various faces of disaster planning and management.

Main themes will include:

- disasters: conceptual issues
- disaster impacts: psychological, social, economic, physical etc
- emergency and relief plans
- assessment of needs and filed methods
- relation between development policies and reconstruction
- community participation after disaster
- the role of women in reconstruction
- vulnerability assessment and risk reduction in natural disasters
- reconstruction after man-made disasters.
- refugee camps and resettlement plans

The programme will be of particular interest to planners, architects, officials from relief organisations and governments, and field workers.

Fee: £1,290 (residential)

Science, technology and society: education for citizenship and work (9649)

2 to 12 September 1996 *Oxford*
Directed by Dr Joan Solomon of the Oxford University Department of Educational Studies

This event is the third in a highly successful series of British Council international seminars on this subject.

Invited experts will address the following topics:

- STS for citizenship and scientific culture
- STS resources for environmental education
- Science for health education
- Science and technology in schools
- Technology education
- Vocational science in school, further and higher education
- Industry and science education - learning skills in science

The programme will be of particular interest to planners, managers, teacher trainers, curriculum developers, teachers, and those responsible for innovations.

Fee: £1590 (residential)

Science Parks (9699)

1 to 12 September 1996 *Sunderland*
Directed by Professor Jeffrey R Brown

The seminar will identify the benefits of university partnership in industrial development, and will illustrate different models.

Main themes will include:

- university/industry collaboration
- innovation
- competitiveness

The programme will be of particular interest to staff in universities, development agencies, industrial organisations and departments of commerce.

Fee: £1,000 (residential)

The management of change (9663)

27 October to 8 November *Worthing*
by John Wilbourn and Dr Richard Gould

The seminar will provide participants with a deeper insight into the nature of change processes and specific skills and techniques to manage actual change.

Main themes will include:

- social and psychological elements of organisational change and development
- integrated management and leadership
- power and influence

The programme will be of particular interest to experienced public and private sector managers involved in the transitional process including structural, organisational and corporate changes.

Fee: £1,290 (residential)

For further information contact: International Seminars Department, The British Council, 1 Beaumont Place, Oxford OX1 2PJ. Tel: 01865 316636 Fax: 01865 516590/57368. E-mail: international. seminars@britcoun.org

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